

HOW TO BECOME A PRIVATE SECRETARY

QUALIFICATIONS
TRAINING . . .
WORK

By
ARTHUR SHEPPARD
PRIVATE SECRETARY TO HIS GRACE
THE ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY

London
T. FISHER UNWIN
PATERNOSTER SQUARE
1903

[All rights reserved]

CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	9
NATURAL QUALIFICATIONS	14
ACQUIRED QUALIFICATIONS	20
CORRESPONDENCE	28
CORRESPONDENCE— <i>continued</i>	38
REGISTERING AND FILING LETTERS	48
PRIVATE AND DOMESTIC ACCOUNTS	57
MISCELLANEOUS WORK	66
MECHANICAL APPLIANCES	75
NOTABLE MEN AT WORK WITH THEIR SECRETARIES	82

HOW TO BECOME A PRIVATE SECRETARY

QUALIFICATIONS—TRAINING—WORK

INTRODUCTION.

THE designation “Private Secretary” has for some people a certain attractiveness. It suggests an occupation at once easy, honourable, and lucrative; a position of some dignity and social importance; and a sphere of large possibilities. It is assumed that almost any gentlemanly youth of tolerably good education can fill such a position if he be fortunate enough to get it, and that the heavy expense of placing him in one of the professions, or the lesser cost of enabling him to compete for Civil Service and other Government appointments, may all be avoided if only one of these very desirable private secretarial posts can be secured for him.

Now there is some truth and a good deal of error in this estimate. Generally speaking, the private secretary does occupy a position both honourable and responsible; it may even be one which gives him a certain social status; and it is without doubt one affording more than ordinary opportunities of advancement and good work. But it is a mistake to suppose that it is, in the majority of cases, an easy position, that its emoluments are necessarily large, and that the qualifications required are those possessed by the generality of young men. On the contrary, the work

How to become a Private Secretary

of a private secretary to-day often demands long and irregular hours and a good deal of clerical drudgery ; the remuneration is sometimes scarcely commensurate with the amount of responsibility and actual work involved ; and the qualifications necessary, both natural and acquired, are not to be found in every young man who has had the advantage of a public school education or even of a university course. In short, a modern private secretaryship is, as a rule, far from being a sinecure, and natural aptitude for the work requires to be supplemented by special training.

But when all this has been said, there remain these facts : (1) That an increasing number of public men are looking out for capable private secretaries. (2) That the work they want done, if heavy and responsible, is usually very varied, often most interesting, and frequently of considerable importance to the world at large. (3) That many young men, who are, so far as natural gifts go, partly equipped for this kind of work, have never thought of fully qualifying themselves for it by the special training which is further necessary.

The object of this little manual is to enumerate the qualifications required in a private secretary, and to describe in some detail the varied character of his work and the kind of preparation desirable for it, and thus to enable youths and young men to judge for themselves whether, if the nature of the occupation commends itself to them, they may reasonably hope to be successful competitors in this particular line of life.

It will, of course, be understood that the private secretary here in view is not the man who usually fills the position in the *entourage* of some personage of supreme official or social distinction : only a man of considerable intellectual attainments and very large knowledge and experience of men and things would be able to fill such a responsible post. Nor is it even the young man who, for his family connections or for

Introduction

reasons of expediency, is chosen to be the private secretary, paid or unpaid, of some important Government official, and who sometimes (it must in fairness be acknowledged) proves himself, after years of experience under a wise chief, to be a very able man, and perhaps, in due course, takes high office in the State. Both of these are on a somewhat different plane from that on which the man I have in view lives and moves. The private secretary here described is rather the "right-hand man," who, in these bustling days, is becoming indispensable to busy Members of Parliament, to over-worked Bishops and other religious leaders, to active philanthropists, to wealthy merchants and ship-owners, to leading professional men, etc. Many of these are to-day wisely relying for secretarial assistance, not upon Oxford and Cambridge graduates, but rather upon men who, with smaller privileges of an academic sort, have added a business training to modest educational attainments, and have been able to show themselves in other ways "apt and meet" for the work.

It will be observed that in the foregoing remarks I have spoken only of young *men*. This is mainly for convenience sake. Young women of fair education may well find congenial occupation in secretarial work if they will only take the trouble first to assure themselves as to their natural aptitude, and then, if they are satisfied as to this, set to work diligently to acquire, not only the special knowledge mentioned in this book, but also the wider general knowledge of public affairs which is essential, and the lack of which often prevents an otherwise qualified woman from achieving success. It would, of course, be idle to assert that a woman would be a suitable occupant of any and every secretarial post. The field open to them is probably not so large as that open to men; but there is a field, and there are already not a few capable girls filling

How to become a Private Secretary

positions in it with credit to themselves and satisfaction to their employers.

A pertinent question may here be asked and answered. "Being in my own opinion qualified," says the would-be private secretary, "how shall I set to work to obtain the post I desire?" The answer may seem rather disappointing. Undoubtedly the great majority of secretaryships are secured by private recommendation, and the aspirant should lose no suitable opportunity of making known his wishes privately to persons who are interested in him, and who are likely to hear of vacancies. He is not advised to write to people who have no knowledge of him, on the mere chance of "something coming of it." Such indiscriminate intrusions seldom do good, and not unfrequently do harm. If there be no friend or acquaintance who can be made cognizant of the desideratum—or even if there be—it may be well to get one's name and requirements entered in the books of a Polytechnic or a Y.M.C.A. employment bureau, or at one of the many shorthand and typewriting schools, or at some other similar institution where application is likely to be made for temporary or permanent secretarial help. An occasional advertisement in the *Times*, *Spectator*, *Athenæum*, or any journal which comes into the hands of literary, professional, and public men, is sometimes a good investment. The aspirant, however, must not be discouraged if he does not secure a post at once. Vacancies of this sort are not quite every-day occurrences, as principals and secretaries are naturally very unwilling to sever their necessarily confidential relationship, which often ripens into mutual attachment and friendship. During the waiting-time the embryo secretary should make the most of his present opportunities. A clerkship in an office, or a junior reportership on the staff of a newspaper, or any

Introduction

other occupation of a similar kind, may be made to afford him just that training in actual business or in knowledge of affairs which is an invaluable part of the private secretary's equipment; and it may be that such employment will bring him into contact with the very people who will be able ultimately to introduce him to the work to which he is looking forward. Another plan likely to be fruitful of result is the seeking for evening or occasional work of a secretarial sort. Many a professional or public man, while not requiring the full time of a qualified helper of this kind, is thankful to obtain the assistance, perhaps for two or three evenings a week, of a capable business-like shorthand amanuensis, who will help him with his correspondence, keep small books of account, and relieve him of many odds and ends of clerical drudgery. Let the young man who aspires to greater things begin here if he can find an opening (it is not usually difficult), and, if he does this lesser work diligently, and proves himself to be capable and reliable, it will not be surprising if the smaller post leads to the larger one.

Another question may fairly be put: "What is the remuneration usually given for private secretarial work?" Again, the answer may seem unsatisfactory because of its indefiniteness. The amount and quality of the work required, the financial position of the person requiring it, possible privileges to which no monetary value can be attached—these and other circumstances vary so much that it would be simply impossible to name any sum as an average salary. All that can be said is, that, on the whole, the remuneration is generally adequate for the position the secretary is called upon to maintain, and that it compares not unfavourably with the salaries of others who are engaged in clerical work under different conditions.

NATURAL QUALIFICATIONS.

As I have already indicated, the essential qualifications for private secretarial work are, roughly speaking, of two kinds—the one natural, the other acquired—the one a part of what a man is, the other a part of what he makes himself. I do not say that some of the characteristics here classed as natural *cannot* be acquired; but certainly the man who owns them as natural gifts is much more likely to display them advantageously—*i.e.* without self-consciousness or effort—than he who laboriously acquires them. Nor do I say that the private secretary must have every single one of the attributes mentioned; but clearly the more he has the better. Again, some qualifications—*e.g.* the ordinary virtues so well summed up in the good old word “uprightness”—are so obviously indispensable that it is hardly necessary even to mention them. They (together with the still more important religious qualities, which it would be out of place to discuss here) form in this, as in every calling, the foundation of rock on which alone an enduring superstructure can be built.

First, then, of the qualifications which should belong to the man rather than to his attainments, is *Gentlemanliness*. I am not concerned to give an exact definition of a “gentleman.” He is not easily

Natural Qualifications

defined, and the term is ordinarily so loosely applied that it is at once very comprehensive and very exclusive. But the word I have used indicates fairly well that moderate care for personal appearance, that general refinement of speech and manner, and that courteous bearing towards others, which go far to make a man acceptable to all classes. It includes such commonplace things as the wearing of neat clothes and clean linen, and it excludes everything showy and extravagant. It owns what Charles Lamb quaintly calls "the goodly ornatuer of well-apparell'd speech"—the graceful and suitable expression of what one wishes to say—and it disowns affectation or artificiality of voice or language on the one hand, and brusque or careless diction on the other. It emphasizes the well-known motto of the founder of Winchester College, "Manners makyth man," and it repudiates as impossible in any circumstances the least courtesy to others.

Tact, Common Sense ("the least common," some one has said, "of all the senses"), and *Good Judgment* are other essentials. The private secretary who can deal with facts in a matter-of-fact way, divest himself of fancies and prejudices, see both sides of a question, weigh impartially the arguments in a controversy, unravel the tangle of a difficulty, suggest to his principal a wise course of action, a key to a situation, a way round an awkward corner, and himself tactfully deal with correspondents and others who are inclined to be troublesome, is an invaluable man. It is probable that in the early days of his secretariat he will not be entrusted with work which requires the fullest exercise of these gifts, but his chief will soon find out how far he possesses them, and will not be slow to avail himself of them.

Some principals make much use of their secretaries as critics. In a most interesting chapter of the "Life

How to become a Private Secretary

of Archbishop Tait,"¹ Dr Davidson,² the Archbishop's chaplain-secretary and biographer, says :—

In everything which concerned his (the Archbishop's) public or official action, however confidential its plan, however personal its application, he not only permitted but peremptorily required on the part of his chaplain-secretary the fullest knowledge and the most frank criticism. I remember my bewilderment when one afternoon, a few days after I had left my curacy and settled at Lambeth, he rebuked me seriously for a temporary absence which had prevented him, he said, from despatching an urgent and important letter because I had not seen it. Seeing my surprise, he added, "I have been more than twenty years a Bishop, and I have never, if I could help it, written a single letter of importance without giving it to somebody to pick holes in ; and the silliest people," he continued with a twinkle, "are often the best critics. So take that draft and let me know in half-an-hour what you think about it."

Dr Davidson shows that, notwithstanding this desire for criticism, Archbishop Tait was the last man to be in any way led by his subordinates, and that he valued this kind of help at its proper worth, regarding it mainly as a measure of precaution. Undoubtedly there are many men who, in like manner if in lesser degree, are glad to avail themselves of a second pair of eyes, and the help of a secretary who can in this sense see clearly is sure to be valued.

Closely allied to the last mentioned qualities is *Caution*. In all his duties, and especially in those matters which are left to his own discretion, the private secretary must not forget that he is acting for another, and that it is his business to faithfully reflect the mind of his chief. By this I do not mean that he is not to hold views diverse from him upon any given subject, or that he is to be afraid to give expression to them on suitable occasions either in public or in private ; but that he must not, when acting in his

¹ Vol. II. pp. 551-597.

² Now himself Archbishop of Canterbury.

Natural Qualifications

representative capacity, commit his principal to any opinion or line of action which he is not absolutely certain that his principal will endorse. Caution is also necessary in dealing with unknown correspondents, for among them are sometimes to be found people who are anxious to draw public men into premature statements of policy and the like, or into mischievous controversy. The professional begging-letter writer, too, is often a clever suppliant and frequently scores off the incautious philanthropist. Against these various "designers" a cautious secretary may do much to protect a chief who is himself too busy to be always on the look-out for traps.

Another prime qualification is a real *Love of Work*. The man who would be prepared to give only the very minimum of time and labour to the service of his chief, or who would place his activity in exact ratio to his remuneration, or who would deliberately put his own concerns before those of his employer and evade obvious duties, had better leave secretarial work alone. In this, as in most other callings, there must be whole-heartedness if solid success is to be achieved.

Method and *Order*, too, are very important twin elements. However well qualified in other ways, the secretary who has little or no idea of doing things in an orderly fashion, who sets about his work without well-defined plans, who allows papers and books to lie about in disordered heaps, will ere long find confusion worse confounded and effective work impossible. No doubt some people are born with orderly minds, and to these disorder is not only distasteful but positively painful. But orderly and methodical habits need not be regarded as exclusively natural gifts. They *may* be acquired, and some men who have lacked them naturally have by force of circumstances been compelled to habituate themselves

How to become a Private Secretary

to systematic methods of arrangement, and have ultimately found some pleasure in practising them and more still in their results.

The late Mr Gladstone may be quoted as a master of order and method. One of his private secretaries (Sir Edward Hamilton) thus describes this characteristic of the great statesman :¹

Order and method, to which he attached the greatest importance "as a means of increasing power and efficiency for good," he carried to great perfection. He was a pattern of tidiness. No book was out of its place in his room; there was never any litter on his table, and every drawer in it was arranged most nattily . . . His papers were stored away with unsurpassed neatness, and the muniment-room (consisting of the fire-proof annexe which he built a few years ago to his "sanctum" at Hawarden) will be the wonder and admiration of those who may some day have access to it. In that octagon chamber there will be found all the letters which he thought worth preserving out of his vast and varied correspondence, and also many memoranda and other papers of interest. The aggregate contents of the chamber must be enormous: indeed he made a computation that the letters alone amounted more nearly to 100,000 than 50,000. His orderliness greatly helped him to keep pace with his correspondence and other work.

A Good Ear may seem for the moment a rather strange qualification to suggest, but the reader will quickly surmise that I am not proposing a musical test, but that the phrase is used to describe that close attention to verbal instructions which makes it unnecessary for them to be repeated. Few things are more irritating to a busy man than to be compelled to tell his secretary more than once what is desired in a particular matter; and while the secretary may properly require that instructions shall be clear and sufficiently full, he ought to give his whole attention

¹ "Mr Gladstone—a Monograph," by Sir Edward Hamilton, K.C.B. (John Murray.) 1898.

Natural Qualifications

to the subject under treatment and never require his chief to repeat the directions relating to it.

Powers of Initiation and Organisation in a secretary are not unfrequently of the greatest service to himself and his principal, although I should not place them among the absolutely necessary qualifications, because in many cases it is the principal who initiates and organises, and the secretary who does the detailed work. But, here again, the man who knows how to delegate work will usually be quick to appreciate in his secretary any sign of the possession of these exceptional powers, and will contrive to give them scope for exercise.

I have now enumerated the chief natural qualifications for the work under consideration. Other useful attributes might of course be mentioned—*e.g.* promptitude, precision, patience, perseverance, the faculty of observation, a good memory, a sense of proportion, a measure of self-reliance, ability to concentrate one's mind upon the particular bit of work in hand, the happy knack of adapting oneself to changing environment, and so on. But these perhaps come into the category of counsels of perfection. Let me conclude this chapter by mentioning one thing which is not required, *viz. self-assertiveness*. The danger for a man who has most of the qualifications mentioned above is that he may unconsciously put himself too much in the foreground. This tendency will find its antidote in a careful deference to the wisdom, the experience, and the wishes of his chief.

ACQUIRED QUALIFICATIONS.

FORTUNATE is the secretarial aspirant who has received his education at one of our greater public schools. He thereby obtains a "start" which ought to tell in his favour throughout the course of his life. But, as we all know, success does not inevitably follow initial advantage. The boy who gets a good training at an unpretentious Grammar School may quite possibly, with a little extra exertion after school-days are over, come alongside, even if he does not pass, his better-placed competitor. And even the Elementary School lad need not despair. He has ere now achieved great things, and, if he has grit, tact, and perseverance, he may make excellent running. In either case the ordinary curriculum is only a preliminary to a special course of study, if a private secretaryship is to be the goal. The new ground may or may not have been entered upon at school: clearly it should immediately afterwards be covered as completely as possible.

In the forefront of the qualifications which should be acquired I place *Ability to take a good Shorthand Note*. I cannot imagine how the private secretary to any busy public or professional man nowadays can satisfactorily fill his position unless he is able to take a fairly rapid shorthand note of the utterances of his chief, whether they are in the shape of full replies to letters, or of terse verbal instructions, or of detailed memoranda, or of drafts of speeches, reports, etc. If

Acquired Qualifications

a personal reference may be permitted, I would unhesitatingly acknowledge my own great indebtedness to Pitman's system of shorthand in both journalistic and secretarial work during the last twenty years. Without it I could not have done one-half of the work that by its aid I have been able to do. Among the many people of different callings to whom shorthand is a most valuable adjunct, the private secretary is certainly not least its debtor.

A word as to thoroughness in the study of shorthand will not be out of place here. Although there is a large army of capable shorthand writers—men and women who are able not only to take a fast note but to read it fluently at any distance of time—it is distressing to find many others who, while professing to write shorthand, produce notes which are based on a very slender study of the system, and which would be utterly unreadable by themselves or anybody else a few months or even weeks later. This is a pity. It not only tends to bring shorthand into disrepute, but it prevents the writer from exhibiting his powers to the best advantage before his employer, and robs him of the real pleasure which attends the doing of effective work. The private secretary may sometimes have to refer to his shorthand notes written years ago, and it is all-important that these should be clear and capable of transcription at any time by himself, and, if necessary, by other writers of the same system. The following actual occurrence is adduced by way of illustration. A private secretary was absent on his holiday. His principal had occasion to refer to a letter which had been dictated by him to the secretary some months previously. Of this the only copy preserved was in the secretary's shorthand note-book. Another writer of the same system (quite unfamiliar with the secretary's shorthand writing) was sent for and asked to read the letter in the secretary's note-book, and was able

How to become a Private Secretary

readily to do so, and thus demonstrate the advantage of clear notes on the one hand, and ability to read them on the other.

Typewriting is so closely associated with shorthand that no apology need be made for placing them here in juxtaposition. While it cannot be reasonably said that ability to use a typewriter is a *sine qua non* in the sphere of work under consideration, there is strong probability that, other things being equal, the candidate who is a typist will stand a better chance than the one who is not. There is now scarcely any public or professional man who objects to the use of the typewriter by his amanuensis in the drafting or copying of reports, memoranda, etc., although there may be still one here and there who finds it difficult to acquiesce in his letters going forth otherwise than in handwriting. Here, again, thoroughness of work must be urged. The secretary who is permitted to use the typewriter for everything except letters will, in all probability, find his chief's partial dislike to the machine give way entirely before excellence in the work done by its aid. With a number of first-rate machines on the market, with many good schools where typewriting is well taught, and with exhaustive handbooks like "Pitman's Typewriter Manual,"¹ and Mr A. E. Morton's "Modern Typewriting and Manual of Office Procedure,"² there would seem to be little excuse for slipshod work.

Little need be said of the value of the typewriter to the man who has much writing to do. It is, in my own knowledge, an incalculable boon to the busy secretary. It not only facilitates his work, but it tends to conserve his energies. The weariness which

¹ Published by Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons, 1 Amen Corner, E.C. (3s.).

² Published by the Smith Premier Typewriter Company, 14 Gracechurch Street, E.C. (2s. 6d.).

Acquired Qualifications

follows many consecutive hours of pen-writing—to say nothing of chest troubles, and that terrible affliction known as “writer’s cramp”—is sensibly diminished when the typewriter is entirely, or even partially, used, and my strong advice to the would-be private secretary is to add typewriting to his qualifications, if he has not already done so.

The use of the writing machine, however, must not be allowed to hinder the cultivation of a good style of *Handwriting*. Good penmanship will always rank high in the estimation of many people, and not least of those who have to use clerical help. Employers like to judge people partly by their handwriting, and, when there is a vacant secretarial post, no candidate stands a better chance of obtaining it, *cæteris paribus*, than he whose letter of application is not only well expressed but clearly and neatly written.

Languages must have their proper share of attention. The young man who thinks of following the line marked out in these pages may be glad if he has not allowed the *Latin* he learned at school to become rusty; and, even so, he will do well to set about giving it some extra polishing, for in any secretarial post, especially in one where the principal is a literary man, the occasional Latin sentence or phrase, if nothing more, is sure to occur, and the secretary will find it rather vexatious to be obliged to confess that he cannot master it. Similarly with *French* and *German*. He may not have to converse in either tongue, but the use of a French phrase in his chief’s dictation, or the translation of a French or German letter, ought not to be beyond his powers. In short, there should be a sufficient general acquaintance with these languages to enable him to make a modest use of them should occasion require; and if, when he has obtained his secretarial post, he finds that something more in either of them, or in some other

How to become a Private Secretary

language, will be useful, he will be a wise man if he does his best to acquire it.

It should go without saying, too, that his use of his mother-tongue ought to be beyond reproach. The ability to write in clear, unaffected *English*, free from ambiguity or grammatical error, will be one of his best recommendations, and no pains should be spared in the endeavour to acquire this primary qualification. In all his getting, let him get good English.

To this end he will read as widely as the exigencies of his other studies will allow. Indeed, if *General Reading* is likely to be altogether crowded out, the time devoted to the acquirement of special branches of knowledge should be re-arranged, so that at least a few good books may be read—really *read*—in the course of a year. In these days of cheap editions of standard works and free public libraries, there is no lack of books. The danger is that valuable time may be wasted on the reading of the wrong books, and one may be pardoned for giving again the oft-repeated caution against the danger of trying to support intellectual life by assimilating only the “plum cake” of literature. So-called “light reading” is often excellent refreshment, but it will not by itself keep the mind healthy and vigorous.

In addition to the reading of sound books there must be a good *General Knowledge of Affairs*; by which I mean that a secretary should know in a general way what is going on in the world with regard to political, social, educational, and other questions. It may not improbably happen that he will be required now and then to go into some such question in detail, and at these times he will find his general knowledge very advantageous.

Some *Knowledge of Accounts* is desirable. In a later chapter illustrations of the books of account

Acquired Qualifications

which a private secretary may be called upon to keep are given (see pp. 57-65). They are usually of the simplest kind—often only a mere record of income from invested funds, and of such outgoings as subscriptions and donations, household expenses, rates and taxes, etc. But even such accounts as these (and especially if the household is large) require methodical and careful treatment, and it is therefore desirable that the secretary should know at least the elements of book-keeping and be able to prepare a periodical balance-sheet. He will, of course, understand such simple matters as, say, the difference between "open" and "crossed" cheques, the various methods of remitting money through the Post-Office, and the like. In large establishments he may have to check the petty cash accounts kept by head servants; or, if his chief receives income direct from house property or land instead of through an agent, or from professional sources, there may be other and larger accounts to keep. For all ordinary requirements, however, some simple form of book-keeping usually suffices.

Practical experience of Office Work may not in all cases be a possible part of the training of the secretarial candidate, and, where this is lacking, the knowledge which may be acquired at Technical Schools, or even from the many valuable little Guides to Office Work¹ which are now published, should not be despised. But undoubtedly, if the opportunity offers of putting this knowledge to the practical test of work in an office, it is worth while to take advantage of it. The actual experience thus gained, even if it extends over a few months only, is invaluable to the man we have in view, as clinching the knowledge he has theoretically obtained, and as conducing to

¹ For example, "The Beginner's Guide to Office Work," published by Macmillan. (1s.)

How to become a Private Secretary

effective work when he gets into private secretarial harness.

It often happens that a busy man is glad to delegate to others the partial care of his library, and if the secretary knows something about *Classifying and Cataloguing Books*, and can find time to keep the bookshelves in order, look up books lent, and see to necessary re-binding, etc., he will (if he be a lover of books) thus find pleasurable occupation for an occasional spare hour, and at the same time do his chief a real service. A short description of a simple method of cataloguing books is given in a future chapter (see pp. 71-73).

Many other smaller acquirements might be mentioned as useful, and some of these will be referred to incidentally in subsequent pages. My present object has been to show what are the acquirements necessary, or at any rate desirable. The extent of the course of study suggested may at first sight seem too large for any but those who can give their whole time to it. This is not really the case. The young man who has some regular daily employment has probably already acquired, for the purposes of that employment, some of the knowledge here set forth as essential for the special work under consideration, and, if he is in earnest, he will find that a large amount of varied study can be fitted into a few spare hours, to say nothing of odd minutes. Then, too, one subject often leads on naturally to another, and, indeed, sometimes overlaps it or runs alongside of it. For instance, in magazines printed in shorthand, practice in reading the system is frequently so arranged as to enable the student concurrently to become familiar with really good literature. Also it is a matter of common experience that the knowledge of one language is helpful in the study of another. If these facts are borne in mind, the task which the secretarial candidate has before him will

Acquired Qualifications

not seem so very formidable. It is also fair to say that *expert* knowledge in every direction indicated will not be expected of him at the outset of his chosen work. The knowledge of some subjects will probably have to be perfected as the work progresses, and adequate knowledge of others can only come with experience. What *is* wanted at the outset is a sufficient grasp of each subject to make fairly effective work a certainty.

CORRESPONDENCE.

THE work of the private secretary, in almost every case, includes a large amount of correspondence. This is usually of a varied character, as, generally speaking, the man who requires a secretary is one who has "many irons in the fire." In this variety lies a good deal of the attractiveness of the work, and at the same time the need for the general knowledge on the part of the secretary which has already been urged in these pages. The range of the correspondence—including, as it usually does, letters on private and personal affairs, as well as on general and public matters—is, however, an element of difficulty to the methodical secretary. He cannot deal with the letters on quite the systematic lines which are followed in large commercial houses and in public offices. But he can work *to some extent* on these lines, and I think it will be useful if I here set forth (1) the system used in one of our Government Departments; (2) a method which has been found serviceable for private work; (3) the same method adapted to meet the exigencies of exceptionally heavy private correspondence. Probably no system which could be suggested would meet exactly the conditions of many cases of private work, and the secretary who takes either No. 2 or No. 3 as his model may be glad to supplement it by borrowing hints from No 1 or from other sources.

(1) The process in the Government Department

Correspondence

referred to is roughly as follows. (I purposely omit mention of small details, as they would tend to confuse the description.) The official letters on their arrival are taken to a room known as the Registry. Here they are deprived of their envelopes, care being taken by the Superintendent of the Registry and his assistants to see, before the envelopes are cast aside, that the enclosure in each case is meant for the person to whom the envelope is addressed. Each letter is flattened out and fastened inside a paper "jacket" or cover, both jacket and letter being stamped (by means of a small automatic numbering machine) with the name of the Department, the date on which the letter is received, and a number (the same on jacket and letter). By these numbers—which run consecutively from No. 1 on 1st Jan. of each year to, say, No. 25,000 on 31st Dec., or whatever is the number reached—the letters are henceforth known and at all times traced in the books of the Department. The following particulars of each letter are then entered in a Numerical Register: The number it has just received, its date, the name of the person (or, if from another Government Department, the name of the Department) from whom it comes, and the subject with which it deals. To facilitate reference the same particulars are also entered in a Subject Register, the difference between the two books being, as their names indicate, that in the one a particular letter can be immediately located by a known number, and in the other it can be quickly traced by the subject if the number is not available as the primary indicator. If the letter has reference to previous correspondence, it now goes to the Record or Paper Room, where the earlier letters or documents (which already have each their separate jacket) are tied up in a bundle with it, the new arrival being on the top. This done, the packet is

How to become a Private Secretary

ready to go to the executive officer who is to deal with it. Before it leaves the Registry, however, yet another registration has to be effected. This is simply an entry in a separate book of the name of the Division or Sub-division of the Department to which the packet is to be despatched. The Division is, as it were, debited with the packet, and duly receives credit for it when it is ultimately returned to the Registry. Similarly, if the packet passes from one Division to another, each Division registers the fact of its arrival and subsequently of its departure. Thus the whereabouts of any particular set of correspondence can always be established.

A word as to the cover which we have called a "jacket." It is foolscap in size, once folded so as to give four pages that may be written upon. At the head of the front page several small compartments are ruled off, and in these are put entries corresponding to the entries in the Numerical and Subject Registers described above. The remainder of the sheet is divided into two columns, one headed "memoranda" and the other "minute." In the former are inserted the comments of the various executive officers who deal with the matter in hand, while in the latter is written, by one of these officers, a draft of the reply to be sent to the writer of the letter, or the instructions which the officer desires to give.

The packet whose course we are following, having left the Registry and arrived in the Division where it is to be dealt with, and the responsible officer having drafted his reply in the "minute" column of the jacket (consulting, if necessary, one of the principal Secretaries of the Department), the next process is to get the draft reply fair-copied. For this purpose, the bundle goes to the Copying and Despatching Room, where the reply is typewritten by one of a staff

Correspondence

of women typists, two carbon copies being taken at the same time. This done, the reply is sent back to the officer who drafted it, to be read over by him and to be signed by a Secretary, and he returns it to the Copying Room for despatch. Any corrections or alterations which may have been made are entered in MS. on the carbon copies, and the name of the official who has signed is inserted. The letter is then put in an envelope, together with any necessary enclosures, and sent to the post. One of the carbon copies is filed in a letter-case (the contents of the case being periodically bound up); the other is placed in the jacket with the original letter. At the head of the Copying and Despatching Room is a capable Superintendent, who carefully checks all the operations. Once more the packet goes back to the divisional officer, who, if he is satisfied that everything necessary has been done, returns it to the Registry from whence he originally received it and is duly "credited" with the return. As an additional safeguard the clerks in the Registry are also expected to assure themselves that all necessary action has been taken before finally sending the packet to the Paper Room to be permanently registered, indexed, and filed.

The process here described may at first sight seem unnecessarily elaborate and even complicated, but the reader must remember that in large Government Offices, where the yearly influx of letters is numbered by tens of thousands, and where officers and clerks are numbered by scores, and in some cases by hundreds, there is necessarily considerable delegation and sub-division of work. This involves a complexity in the operations which would be absurd in smaller offices, and quite impossible in private secretarial work. My only reason for describing such a system at some length here is that a secretarial student may, I think, be glad to have the facts before him in case

How to become a Private Secretary

he should hereafter be under the necessity of supplementing or amending in some particulars the plan of dealing with private correspondence which either he or his chief has adopted.

(2) Here is a method for private work which is probably as simple and effective as any that can be devised. For the sake of illustration we will imagine the country or town house of a gentleman who is actively interested in many religious, social, and philanthropic enterprises, and who takes some share in political life. Correspondence is heavy, and he keeps a secretary. We will take the procedure in the morning, when letter-bags are heaviest. When the letters are delivered a responsible servant sorts them, and places in the secretary's room all those intended for the principal and the secretary. The latter at once puts aside unopened those which are evidently intended for his chief's eye only—*e.g.* those marked "private" or "personal," or those which, by the handwriting on the cover, he identifies as coming from the chief's relatives. If he inadvertently opens one of these private letters, the first line of the letter may show him his mistake, and he, of course, reads no further, but replaces the letter in its envelope, marking his initials prominently on the outside to show that he is responsible for the opening. These private letters having been placed at once in the hands of his chief if he is at home, or posted to him if he is absent, the secretary proceeds to open the remainder, assuring himself in each case, before consigning the envelope to the waste-paper basket, (1) that he has emptied it, (2) that the contents are complete—*i.e.* that the enclosures, if any, referred to in the letter are included—and (3) that the date of the letter corresponds, after allowing for the time occupied in transit, with the date of arrival. If there is an unusual interval between these dates, the envelope is preserved,

Correspondence

in order that post-marks may facilitate enquiry if such becomes necessary. If a letter is not dated, a note is at once made upon it of the date of its receipt.

The secretary then puts into one letter-basket all the letters which have been addressed to himself, or any with which he knows he is at liberty to deal without reference to his chief; and into another basket he puts those which must be submitted to the chief at the first opportunity, any which require early attention being placed on the top. When the opportunity comes, he reads to the chief the letters in this second basket, or tells him (in the case of simple matters) their contents, and in each case he receives instructions as to the action necessary—except in the instances in which the chief takes the letters himself in order that he may send replies with his own hand. In some of the other cases the chief gives the secretary only a few words of direction as to the necessary answer, leaving him to express it in his own way, and this brings about the familiar phrase at the beginning of many letters written by secretaries, "I am directed by Mr _____ to thank you for your letter of yesterday's date, and to say," etc.; or "Lord T_____ desires me to say, in reply to your letter," etc. To a large proportion of the letters, however, the chief dictates his replies, to be subsequently signed by himself. A letter so treated receives a number (commencing at No. 1 on 1st January, and continuing consecutively throughout the year), and a corresponding number is placed by the secretary at the head of the reply in his shorthand note-book. This avoids the possibility of a reply to one letter being mistaken for a reply to another. The chief may have other letters to dictate which have not been called forth by letters received. These also are written in the shorthand note-book and are numbered.

How to become a Private Secretary

The heaviest work of the secretary now begins. He has three sets of letters to write, viz. (1) those which he can deal with himself without reference to the principal; (2) those which he writes in his own name by the principal's direction; (3) those of which he has taken shorthand notes and which will require the principal's signature. As regards the first two sets, a docket on the letter received, or a note on a separate slip of paper attached, is usually a sufficient record of the reply sent. But of the third set a copy is kept (for filing purposes) of the more important replies, and *all* the dictated letters are indexed in the shorthand note-book one by one as they are transcribed. The advantage of this indexing is that a dictated letter, which at the time of writing seemed of insufficient importance to necessitate the keeping of a copy, is sometimes required afterwards to complete a record of a subsequent correspondence, or it becomes serviceable in other ways. A further clue to these uncopied replies is also furnished by the numbers on the original letters, which correspond with the numbers in the note-book. But these originals, if apparently unimportant, are destroyed after a time. The index is therefore in such cases the more reliable reference. When all the letters have been written and addressed, and all necessary enclosures inserted, the secretary obtains his chief's signature to those requiring it, enters all the letters in a "Letters Posted" book, and despatches them. If, owing to pressure of engagements, or for other reasons, the principal is unable to give sufficient time in the morning to deal with all the incoming letters, those which are still unanswered are consigned to a basket to be "carried forward," and it is the secretary's duty to see that these are produced with later arrivals and duly dealt with. The letters that have been answered (with any copies of replies that it may be necessary

Correspondence

to keep) are docketed in blue pencil, at the top right-hand corner, with the name or subject under which they are to be filed and registered, and are placed in a basket to await a favourable opportunity for filing. All baskets are carefully labelled, to avoid possibility of confusion.

(3) In some cases the work of the secretary is too heavy to admit of his doing it all himself, and the employment of an assistant becomes necessary. This involves some modification of the method of dealing with the correspondence which I have just described. The secretary himself still takes all the responsibility of opening and sorting the principal's letters, and of receiving his instructions and seeing that effect is given to them. But the assistant relieves him of many minor details of the work, and also does a considerable amount of the handwriting or typewriting of the letters which have been dictated, transcribing the notes taken by the secretary. The indexed short-hand note-book is superseded by half-sheets of ruled paper (large post 8vo. is a useful size). This is a loss in some ways, as will be gathered from what is said above as to the use of the index of the short-hand note-book for purposes of reference. But there is compensation. The loose sheet can be used in various ways. On the next page is a specimen of it. This paper is attached to the letter to which a reply is to be dictated. "F. & R." at the top stand for "file and register," the space being left for the name or subject under which the letter will be filed. The lines immediately below are for the insertion of the name of the person to whom the reply is going, and of the date of the reply. The space headed "memoranda" serves for such instructions as "keep a copy," or "urgent—must go at once." The remaining space under the heading "minute" is available for the shorthand notes of the dictated reply, or for brief

How to become a Private Secretary

(F. & R.)
(Name)
(Date)
MEMORANDA.
MINUTE.

(Faint lines are continued on the back).

Correspondence

instructions, etc. The advantage of using separate sheets of paper is that the secretary can pass on to his assistant for transcription the shorthand notes he has himself written at his chief's dictation. Or he can, when sending on letters to his chief by post, affix one of these half-sheets to each, and enter under "memoranda" any facts to which he wishes to call the principal's attention ; and, in like manner, the principal can return the letters to the secretary, writing, under the heading "minute" on the attached papers, brief instructions or rough drafts of replies.

As no numbers are used in this method when letters are dictated, care is taken in each case to write on the half-sheet used for the shorthand notes the name of the person to whom the letter is addressed. And this is done at the time of dictation : otherwise confusion would inevitably arise. It takes scarcely longer to rapidly insert the name of the person addressed (often the surname is sufficient) than it would take to write a number.

This substitution of single slips of paper for the shorthand note-book is practically the only difference between methods No. 2 and No. 3, and, of course, the note-book is still useful for taking shorthand notes of drafts of reports, etc., or of very long letters ; but in all such cases carbon copies of the transcripts are kept for filing, so that the note-book is not relied upon for future reference. A convenient way of keeping the blank forms together is to have them bound up like paper-pads or tear-off calendars, or like Pitman's elastic-back note-books. They can then be carried about, or used in a train or anywhere else, as easily as an ordinary note-book.

Methods of registering and filing letters are dealt with on pp. 48-56.

CORRESPONDENCE (CONTINUED).

HAVING set before my readers the details of two or three methods of dealing with large correspondence, I pass on to a number of matters—mostly of a simple kind—connected with this important branch of the private secretary's work. Some of the things mentioned below have been said before by other writers, but no manual on the subject would be complete without them.

The circumstances in which a modern secretary works are not always those of the quietness and comfort of his chief's study or of his own room. For example, he may have to accompany his chief on a round of visits, or on an election tour, or on occasional journeys, short and long, by rail and by road; and the conditions of work will probably at times be difficult and even trying. The writing of legible shorthand notes in a train, for instance, is not quite an easy matter, and the difficulty is enhanced when the attempt is made in a carriage drawn by horses. In the latter case one is almost inclined to state the result in some of the phrases of Charles Dickens's familiar description (put into the mouth of David Copperfield) of his own early struggles to acquire dexterity in the use of an old system of shorthand. It will be remembered that he compares the illegible outlines he produced to "the Chinese inscriptions on an immense collection of tea-chests, or the golden characters on

Correspondence

all the great red and green bottles in the chemists' shops." The capable stenographer, however, is usually equal to all emergencies of this kind.

The process of writing a letter affords many possibilities of error. Take the first line—the address from which the letter is written. In most cases it will be the chief's home address; but, if the letter is written away from home (perhaps on paper stamped with another address), care will have to be taken to convey to the receiver the address to which he is expected to send his reply, if any. Similarly, if the letter is written at home, and it is desired that the reply should be sent direct to the chief at some other address to which he is about to go or has gone, the request will be made at the end or in the body of the letter in some way not likely to be overlooked by the receiver.

The method by which the date of a letter is expressed in figures only—e.g. 23/7/02—should be avoided. In the first place, it is not safe, as a blunder is sure to be made sooner or later, either by writer or receiver. And, further, it involves a certain amount of calculation on the part of the receiver—not, perhaps, at the time the letter is opened, but on occasions of subsequent reference—which causes hindrance and may cause irritation. From a business point of view the same objections apply even more forcibly to the insertion of the names of feasts and saints' days from the Church Calendar. When letters thus dated are referred to in subsequent months or years, it sometimes becomes necessary to refer also to a calendar to determine a date with exactness. The secretary will probably save himself ultimate trouble and annoyance if, when letters come to him dated Easter Eve, or Whit Monday, or the like, he at once himself inserts the proper date, just as he would

How to become a Private Secretary

insert the date of receipt if the letter were altogether undated. One thing is quite inexcusable on the part of any man of business, viz., the dating of a letter simply by the day of the week. The probability of serious mistakes arising therefrom is so obvious that I need not expatiate upon it.

While speaking of this, it may be worth while to advise the embryo secretary to verify dates of meetings, interviews, etc., which are referred to in any letter he is writing or receiving. In the hurry of dictation a chief may sometimes allude to, say, Monday, 16th September, when Monday, 15th September, is meant. If the error goes forth unnoticed, the receiver of the letter, on looking up the date, is puzzled to know whether it should be Monday, 15th September, or Tuesday, 16th September, and delay and trouble are caused by his having to write or telegraph to enquire. It is an excellent plan to state both the day of the week and the day of the month in such cases, but if the two do not agree, there is loss rather than gain in the practice. Even the common use of the words "instant," "ultimo," and "proximo" has its dangers, and some people avoid the terms altogether and use the names of the months in all such phrases as "Your letter of 7th Sept. has to-day reached me," or "In reply to your letter of 10th March," etc. This is perhaps the safest plan, although there would seem to be little danger in referring to "your letter of yesterday's date" in cases where the reply is being written on the day "next ensuing"—as the legal phrase has it.

In all letters commencing with "Dear Sir" or "My Lord," or with any phrase which is not definite enough to apply to a particular person, the name of the addressee should be inserted either at the beginning or end of the letter. It is not usually necessary in private work to insert also the address of

Correspondence

the person to whom the letter is going, as is the almost invariable custom in official and commercial work ; nor need even the name be repeated if the person is directly addressed as "Dear Mr A——," or "My dear Lord B——."

When the secretary is writing letters in his own name, he will be careful not to be too familiar with his chief's correspondents. It is better to err on the side of formality than to presume upon a slight acquaintance. This is the more important when the secretary is a young man, and the person addressed is of riper years and experience.

Then—a golden rule for all "men of letters"—do not write about two or three important subjects on the same sheet of paper. This admonition will more often be necessary for the writers of the letters received than for the secretary, as the latter speedily learns by experience how difficult it is to file such double (or treble)-barrelled missives. But it is well that he should himself bear in mind from the outset that the difficulty he experiences in the matter will be spared to others if he observes the rule ; and, indeed, his practice of writing separate letters on different subjects may prove a good object lesson to his chief's correspondents. To illustrate the difficulty, let us suppose that one of these compound letters is received, (1) making suggestions for the improvement of the Factory Acts ; (2) commending a candidate for the secretaryship of a society ; (3) proposing certain arrangements for a forthcoming meeting. What is the secretary to do with such a letter when he has replied to it ? If he files it under "Factory Acts," the candidate for the secretaryship may be overlooked ; or, if he puts it with other letters relating to the meeting, both the Factory suggestions and the secretarial candidate may be lost sight of ; and so on. The only effective way of

How to become a Private Secretary

dealing with the letter is to copy out two-thirds of it, and place each third in its proper filing-place. Thus, the correspondent has, quite unwittingly, caused an appreciable waste of time and labour on the part of the secretary. The secretary may unconsciously, in the early days of his work, cause the same inconvenience to others ; hence this paragraph.

Another rule which the young secretary should make his own at the very beginning of his work, is that which enjoins invariable courtesy in answering letters as well as in personal intercourse. He should permit absolutely no exception. The temptation is strong sometimes to give a sharp reply to a persistently troublesome correspondent, or to pay back an angry remonstrant "in his own coin." But to do so would be a great mistake, to say the least. The most courteous replies are the most effective, even in highly controversial correspondence. In a future chapter, giving some sketches of notable men at work with their secretaries, it will be noticed that with these men the rule of courtesy was as unalterable as the laws of the Medes and Persians.

While the curtness of rudeness is to be eschewed on the one hand, verbosity and tautology are to be avoided on the other. The ideal letter-writer in work of this kind is the man who can gracefully express in the fewest possible sentences what it is necessary to say.

The greatest pains should be taken to avoid ambiguity, and every letter should be read over carefully by the secretary before it is despatched—or (in the case of a dictated letter) before it is submitted to the chief for signature—with a view to making anything clear that may be doubtful or obscure. About three years ago the late Sir Courtenay Boyle, Permanent Secretary to the Board of Trade, wrote a little book of "Hints on the Conduct of Business, Public

Correspondence

and Private."¹ It contains much valuable advice. On this subject of ambiguity he says :

The writer should never lose sight of the fact that the English language is full of danger from its ambiguity. It is scarcely too much to say that it is the most ambiguous of all civilised languages. It is almost impossible to compile a series of sentences in English no one of which shall be capable of more than one construction. . . . A somewhat remarkable instance occurs in the Report of the Select Committee of the House of Commons on Aged Deseiving Poor—a painstaking and careful committee writing on an important subject. They recommend (paragraph 56) that "any person who satisfies the Pension Authority that he has not within the last twenty years been convicted of an offence and sentenced to penal servitude or imprisonment without the option of a fine, shall receive a certificate to that effect and be entitled to a pension." *This would make entitled to a pension a convict released from a twenty years' sentence the day after his release.*

Curiously enough, the writer himself appears, in the phrase I have italicised, to have fallen into the pit which he has marked "dangerous." The words seem to convey the possibility of a man's being *released from a twenty years' sentence the day after his release*—which is not quite comprehensible. It will be seen that the transposition of a few words would have made all plain. But the ambiguity in this case is hardly to be regretted, for if so experienced and able a man, in the act of warning others, is not successful in avoiding the pitfall, the man whose experience has yet to be gained will realise what care is necessary if he is himself to escape.

The practice of some modern writers is to dispense as far as possible with the use of inverted commas, and in support of it they quote the Bible as the greatest example of a book which gets on very well without them. It is doubtful, however, whether in correspondence we can altogether dispense with these

¹ Published by Macmillan. 3s. 6d.

How to become a Private Secretary

familiar aids to clearness, and the secretary will do well not to run the risk of ambiguity by making exclusion his absolute rule, although he may advantageously set himself against any undue tendency in the opposite direction. He will also be wise if he takes trouble to punctuate his sentences with care. He cannot afford to emulate the lofty indifference often exhibited in legal documents in the matter of stops: the help of the humble comma and its fellows is too valuable: and it is well worth while to make really effective use of this additional safeguard against ambiguity. Mr Allardyce's little book on "Stops: or how to Punctuate"¹ may be studied with advantage by those who require instruction in this matter.

A communication written in the third person may sometimes be appropriate, although it is not so common an occurrence as it was in bygone days. It is not an easy thing to write, and it should only be used in reply to formal invitations, or when writing to some personage whom it would be unsuitable to approach in the usual manner. At best it is an irksome and cumbrous method, and readers of Dickens will remember how amusingly he illustrates (in one of his "Sketches by Boz"—the sketch of the boarding-house) the liability to mix persons and pronouns when writing epistles in this style.

"T. I. presents compt. to I. T. and T. I. begs
To say that i see the advertisement And she will Do
Herself the pleasure of calling On you at 12 o'clock
to-morrow morning.

"T. I. as To apologise to I. T. for the shortness
Of the notice. But i hope it will not inconvenience
you.

"I remain yours Truly
"Wednesday Evening."

Almost as "mixed," although not so illiterate,

¹ Published by Fisher Unwin. 1s.

Correspondence

is the following note—not from the pages of fiction, but from the correspondence-files of a gentleman who was recently called upon to find someone to fill an important public position. The only representatives of fiction in the composition are the names and blanks.

“Colonel Jones presents his compliments to Mr Smith, and desires to state that it would be very consonant to his feelings if he could see his way to appoint his cousin, Captain Robinson, to the — of —, as he has a considerable vested interest in the neighbourhood and in which some of his family have resided for a lengthened period. To the above he may add that he is much liked by his relations, and generally popular.”

The use of the lithographed or printed form of letter is permissible in private work, but much less so than in Government and other offices. It should be employed only in purely formal matters, and in cases where its use is not likely to be misunderstood. It may often be used for the prompt acknowledgment of the receipt of a letter to which a full reply cannot be sent without some delay; or it may be appropriately employed to notify some formal action which is periodically or invariably taken, or to give instructions in reply to frequently-recurring letters of enquiry; or it may be made serviceable as a covering letter when sending subscriptions or paying bills. Beyond this sort of use, however, it is not advisable to go.

If the principal is absent from home for a few days, or for a longer period, the letters arriving during his absence should receive a formal acknowledgment by the secretary, with a promise to forward them or lay them before his chief at the first opportunity. This, of course, does not apply to letters marked “private.” These are forwarded unopened or allowed to wait until the return of the principal, according to the instructions he has given.

How to become a Private Secretary

When documents are sent to be signed, and, instead of being returned to the sender, are to be transmitted to some one else, the sender should always have an acknowledgment of their having been received, completed, and forwarded. This can very suitably be done by means of a printed letter or post-card.

I shall have occasion hereafter to refer to the processes of copying letters, but one thing in connection therewith may be mentioned here. It sometimes happens that, after a letter has been copied, some alteration or modification of words or phrases is made in the original. Such amendment should always be carefully noted in the copy, as it may prove to be of some importance subsequently.

The secretary who in addressing letters does not take pains to give addressees the titles, etc., which belong to them, will inevitably find himself—to use a colloquialism—"in hot water." It is unnecessary to give in this manual a list of the styles of address which should be followed in the very varied cases that are sure to require watchful attention. Instructions on these points of etiquette will be found in many books of reference, and it will be sufficient here to urge that no carelessness in the matter is permissible, and that persons of comparatively modest distinction should no more be deprived of what is customary in regard to recognition of titles and attainments, than persons of the highest rank and eminence. For purposes of reference in these and general matters, the secretary will not be long at his work before he finds the necessity of having within easy reach such annuals as "Who's Who," "Kelly's Handbook," "Debrett's Peerage," "Crockford's Clerical Directory," "Whitaker's Almanack," "Hazell's Annual," etc.

One other important matter has yet to be mentioned, viz., the drafting of letters for the principal's approval. A secretary exists as such to save his chief to the

Correspondence

uttermost in the details of business, and the value of his work is often greatly enhanced if he knows his chief's mind so well as to be able to draft replies to a considerable number of the letters received. Public men who are used to dealing rapidly with large quantities of correspondence, and can dictate with great facility, do not always welcome such aid, preferring rather to stamp their own individuality on at least all the more important letters they send forth. But there are others who find it easier to accept the draft of a capable secretary, modifying or amending it as may seem to them necessary. This latter practice is, of course, quite common in Government departments and in other big offices, and when it is allowed in private work the secretary has an excellent opportunity of taking a big "lift" in weighty matters, and, at the same time, of demonstrating his own ability ; and he will do well to take the fullest possible advantage of it.

It would be easy to mention a score of other minor details in correspondence—e.g., the wisdom of tearing up letters and documents before consigning them to the waste-paper basket ; the necessity of economising in the cost of postage, especially in letters going abroad ; the custom of writing on foolscap paper all letters addressed to Government offices, etc.—but this chapter is already over-long, and I must leave my readers to gather additional hints from other sources.

REGISTERING AND FILING LETTERS.

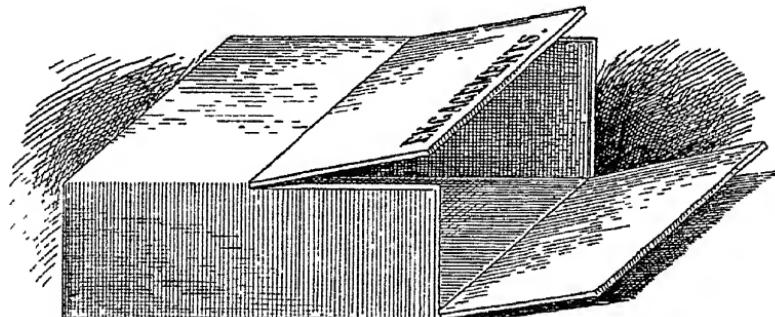
IN many public and commercial offices almost every scrap of correspondence is regarded as sufficiently important to be filed for future reference if such should become necessary. Private correspondence can be dealt with somewhat differently. It may be thus divided: (1) Letters which can be destroyed immediately they have passed out of action; (2) those which require keeping for a limited period; (3) those which must be permanently filed. In determining to which of these three classes a letter should belong, the secretary will be guided mainly by his own judgment; but he may also have to take into account the wishes and practice of his chief. To illustrate the first class of letters referred to, we may take those which relate to engagements—notices of meetings, appointments of interviews, invitations, and the like. These may be destroyed immediately the engagements have been fulfilled; unless it should happen that some letter or document relating to the arrangements for a meeting is worth preserving as a guide for procedure on a future occasion. One of the simplest and most convenient receptacles for this class of correspondence is a small box similar to those used by stationers for enclosing notepaper, etc. On the following page is a sketch of it.

In size it is 9" x 6" x 4", and it is labelled on the outside "Engagements." All letters arranging for meetings, interviews, visits, etc., have the date marked

Registering and Filing Letters

upon them, near the bottom edge, and are then placed in the box in chronological order, the earliest date being at the top. The letters relating to each day's engagements are thus always uppermost, and can be taken out morning by morning. The daily abstractions from the box leave room for frequent additions to it. Other groups of letters having a merely temporary value may be similarly dealt with, either letter-baskets, small boxes, or pigeon-holes, being utilised for the purpose.

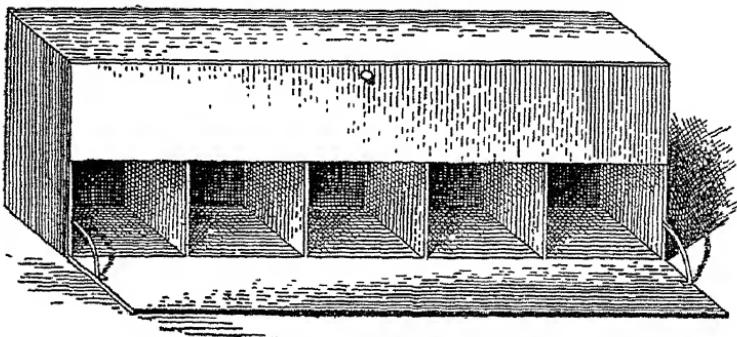
The second and third classes may very well be kept together in a general file, the former being eliminated by a periodical process of "weeding," and the latter



being ultimately transferred to a more permanent file and carefully registered. My own plan for many years has been as follows: All letters as they are dealt with (except those of temporary value) are docketed in blue pencil with the name or subject under which they are to be filed, and are put into baskets labelled "F.R." (file and register). These baskets are cleared at frequent intervals—usually three or four times a week—and the contents are placed in a series of pigeon-holes, each hole being large enough to take a sheet of foolscap folio paper lying flat or resting on its edge. They are made in sets of ten, each set having two doors,

How to become a Private Secretary

which, when shut, close up the holes entirely, and, when open, fall at right angles to the holes (by means of quadrants) and form convenient shelves on which to place papers when they are being filed or referred to. The illustration here given will convey the idea better than further description.



Two sets of ten—*i.e.* twenty holes—are sufficient for the twenty-six letters of the alphabet if some of the less used letters are grouped with others—*e.g.* I and J ; Q and R ; X, Y, Z. Of course a third set may be used for documents, as distinct from letters ; a fourth for pamphlets, reports, etc. ; and so on. And, where space is a consideration, all the sets can be placed one above the other and so form a compact group of thirty or forty pigeon-holes, or more if necessary. The letters in each pigeon-hole are placed either flat or edgewise, and are arranged alphabetically either from top to bottom or from right to left. Each set of correspondence is held together by an ordinary paper-fastener or by an elastic band. At the end of each year the whole of the correspondence is sorted, the letters which it is no longer necessary to keep being destroyed, those which are still in action being carried forward, and those which are to be perma-

Registering and Filing Letters

nently preserved being arranged in envelopes and placed in a large cupboard.

The envelopes are of the bag shape and are made specially strong. The letters inside each are placed in alphabetical order, and the envelope is prominently docketed on the outside with the year and the letter of the alphabet—*e.g.* “1901. A.” If several envelopes are required for one letter of the alphabet, the outside inscription would be thus: “1901. A. 1. Adams—Ashton,” or “1901. S. 3. Socialism—Sunday Observance.” Too many letters should not be packed into a single envelope: only sufficient to loosely fill it and to enable the contents to be withdrawn easily. The envelopes are ultimately taken to a large cupboard or box-room, and arranged alphabetically in one of the compartments into which it is divided. Each compartment is large enough to take the whole of one year’s correspondence, and the alphabetical arrangement is almost sufficient of itself to ensure the quick production of any letter or set of papers that may be wanted. But a register is more convenient for reference, especially if there is only a partial remembrance of a letter or document which is required. For example, the secretary not unfrequently receives a direction of this sort: “Some one wrote to me two or three years ago about the increasing migration of people from the villages to the towns, and gave some very striking facts. See if you can find the letter. I cannot remember the writer’s name.” With only a vague recollection of this sort to guide him, the secretary (unless he has himself a clearer remembrance of the letter in question) would find it tedious work to go through two or three years of the actual correspondence, searching, it may be, for letters labelled “Villages,” or “Depopulation,” or “Land Question,” or any other likely heading. But, with his register, he can quickly glance down many pages of names and subjects in

How to become a Private Secretary

succession and determine the possibility of finding what is wanted. It frequently happens, too, that letters have to be transferred from a past year to the current year, and when this is done a note of the fact in the margin of the register, opposite the entry of the letters so transferred, is sufficient to indicate their whereabouts.

The register corresponds with the letters themselves as regards alphabetic arrangement. It consists of three columns only: the first containing the references to the envelopes; the second, the names of the persons writing, or the subjects of the letters; the third, brief details. The following are illustrations of the kind of entries which may be found:

A 1.	Adams, E. G. Agent Alien Immigrants America Ashton, F. L. G.	Many letters from, chiefly on Educational subjects. (See "Estate Agent.") Statistics, 1900, 1901. Memoranda of visit in 1901. Butler. Letters as to character.
A. 2.	Athenæum Club Atherbody, Lord Aybee, Captain, M P.	Correspondence about conditions of membership. Letters from, about Shop Hours Bill Criticisms of his Scheme for Housing the Poor.

Some cross-references are of course necessary. For example, in connection with the first of the above items, we ought to find under the letter E the reference "Education (see 'Adams, E. G.')". Also under S should be found "Shop Hours Bill (see 'Atherbody, Lord')."

I have used this simple method of filing and registering for a sufficient number of years to prove it to be speedy and reliable. It is purely alphabetic, and two or three minutes are generally sufficient for

Registering and Filing Letters

the production of any letter which has been filed and registered during the whole period. It is a system which is capable of easy adaptation to the largest private correspondence. If, for instance, it is desired to divide the correspondence into sections—Parliamentary, Personal, Financial, General, and so on—separate sets of pigeon-holes can easily be arranged, and the filing and registering can proceed on exactly the same lines ; the Register and the compartments in the permanent filing-cupboard being sub-divided to correspond with the different sections.

I have described this method of filing at some length, not because I regard it as faultless, but because, being familiar with many other systems, I know of none which so well meets the peculiar requirements of large private correspondence. A private secretary is often single-handed—*i.e.* he has no assistant—and, as the process of filing letters is only one of the many duties he is called upon to perform, he naturally desires in that particular matter to work on a system which, while being absolutely reliable, involves the least expenditure of time. I mention below a few other systems which work exceedingly well under different conditions, and from which some useful ideas may be gleaned ; but, so far as I have been able to test these systems, they would seem to involve a great deal more in the shape of detailed work than the method I have described.

In the Government office, whose method of conducting correspondence I described in a previous chapter, the filing and registering of letters and documents is in complete accord with the rest of the system, the numerical principle being predominant throughout. Every shelf in the large Record or Paper Room is packed with what look like bulky white-backed volumes, but which are really strong cardboard

How to become a Private Secretary

covers enclosing the papers. On the back of each cover is marked in large figures the year to which its contents belong, and the "numbers" of the papers it contains. As the arrangement is decimal, the first of the numbers within any cover always ends with a figure 1, and the last always ends with an 0, thus: "1899. 22,311—22,320." A carefully prepared index, in volumes as big as bank ledgers, records the subject of every letter and the name of the writer, a précis of its contents, and the number which was stamped upon the letter when it arrived. A separate register records permanently the number to which the letter has been transferred, if subsequent correspondence with reference to it has passed, and also the present situation of any letter temporarily removed from its place. It is an important principle in the system that all letters and documents belonging to any set of correspondence are carried forward to the number of the last letter received in connection with it. Once possessed of this last number, and assured that the letter is not "charged out" to any officer, you are able to walk to a shelf (sometimes it is a case of climbing also), and, in the cardboard case indicated by the number, you find the complete correspondence of which the letter you have traced forms a part. In some other Government offices a "file number" is given to the first letter of a correspondence and adhered to throughout, all subsequent letters being filed under that number.

The "card system" of filing is extensively used both in America and in this country. There is some variation in the several rival systems which have been placed before the public, but all have a common base, viz., a number of movable blank cards placed edgewise in a box or drawer, and, at intervals, cards projecting beyond the rest and labelled on the projecting part with the letters of the alphabet. Sometimes there is

Registering and Filing Letters

an automatic sliding support at the back, to keep the cards at an angle convenient for reference, and a rod running through the centre of the cards, to prevent their becoming displaced. When used merely as an index the cards are generally of small size. The blank cards are easily taken out for the purpose of writing upon them the notes or references desired, and are as easily replaced in alphabetic order behind the labelled cards. Larger cards (quarto, or foolscap folio, or any other) are used when letters and documents are actually filed between them; and, by means of the projecting labels, not only the usual alphabetic divisions, but all kinds of headings and sub-divisions, may be arranged for. Used in this way, it is an admirable system for the immediate filing of personal correspondence of moderate volume. An additional recommendation is the fact that almost any writing-table or desk with drawers can be fitted with a set of cards arranged to meet varying requirements.

When applied to large correspondence, either in offices or private houses, the card index is usually found to be a very serviceable part of the system, as the drawer of small cards described above can be used as a kind of continuous register in conjunction with almost any system of filing. It is so used in the offices of one of our new London Boroughs. There the correspondence is divided into sections, each section having a distinctive number. For example, "Nuisances" might be numbered 73. If a letter arrives from John Smith complaining of a nuisance in White Horse Street, that letter, with a copy of the reply and with all subsequent correspondence on the subject, is enclosed in a paper cover (docketed on the outside "73. Alleged Nuisance in White Horse Street"), and the packet is placed in a compartment numbered 73, to which all correspondence

How to become a Private Secretary

about nuisances is consigned. Meanwhile Mr Smith's letter has been registered in the card index. On one of the cards in the S block would be found, in its correct alphabetical position, the reference "Smith, John. Complaint of Nuisance in White Horse Street, 73;" another card, under N, would have the simple inscription "Nuisances, 73;" while a third, under W, would contain the entry "White Horse Street. Alleged Nuisance, 73." Of course, all depends upon the care and accuracy of the clerk who makes the entries on the cards day by day, and in the case here mentioned the duty is specially assigned to one man, although the system is well understood by all the other clerks, so that papers can be referred to by any one of them. When the numbered compartments get too full, papers which are out of action are transferred to a room fitted with larger compartments to correspond with the smaller ones in the office—e.g., compartment No. 73 in this room would receive the overflow from compartment No. 73 in the office.

This is a simple illustration of the way in which the foundation principle of the card system may be utilised for registration purposes in conjunction with other methods of filing.

There are many other letter-files which are useful for small private correspondence—box-files, arch-files, spike-files, etc.—but they scarcely come within the purview of this manual, my assumption being that the man who needs a private secretary will probably have a correspondence sufficiently large to necessitate the adoption of a system of filing which is at once ample, speedy, and reliable, and which can be made to respond to a reference test of, say, twenty years ago, as certainly and readily as if the reference were to a period of only a few months back.

PRIVATE AND DOMESTIC ACCOUNTS.

A MODERATE knowledge of book-keeping usually suffices for the accounts which a private secretary is called upon to keep. It often happens that his chief has a family solicitor or confidential agent who manages investments and other monetary transactions connected with capital; or, in the case of an owner of land or houses, there is generally an estate agent who attends to the business affairs of such property. Ordinarily, therefore, the books of account which are kept by the secretary are of one class only, the class of income and expenditure accounts, and the book-keeping required for them is comparatively simple, although it may involve an appreciable amount of detailed work requiring both method and care, especially in connection with the expenditure. There are the petty cash transactions of head servants to check and summarise; there are the payments of wages, tradesmen's bills, subscriptions, donations, etc., to be made and recorded; there are monthly or quarterly abstracts to be drawn up, showing the totals in every branch of expenditure; there are periodical balance-sheets to be prepared and tested by balances at the bank; and so forth. It is in illustration of such work as this that I give below some description of account books, etc., which have been found useful.

CASH BOOK AND SUMMARY BOOK.

The principal's income may be derived from

How to become a Private Secretary

official, professional, or commercial sources; or from investments in stocks and shares. Whatever be its source, it is necessary to keep a record of the items, whether the amounts are paid direct to the principal or to his private account at the bank. The simplest plan is to enter them on the left-hand side of a folio (double-page) cash book. These entries will probably be more or less a reproduction of the entries in the bank pass book, but it is important to have them at hand in the cash book in order that income and expenditure may be compared at any moment. They also form a record of the dates on which dividends and other regular receipts fall due. The following are the sort of items which may thus have to be entered:—

1902

Week ending 11th Jan.

			£ s d	£ s d
Jan. 6	Cash at Bank, 4th Jan. Share of profits in business of T. R. & Co., one quarter to Xmas, 1901. <i>Less</i> Income-Tax at 1s 2d.		250 0 0 14 11 8	936 8 4
	Dividends—2½ Consols . . . <i>Less</i> Income-Tax . . .		27 10 0 1 12 1	235 8 4
	Local Loans 3% Stock. <i>Less</i> Income-Tax . . .		60 0 0 3 10 0	25 17 11
,, 7	Bell & Sons, House Agents— Rents for Quarter ended Xmas, 1901. <i>Less</i> Commission and Repairs . . .		79 4 2 12 9 7	56 10 0
, 10	Tripp & Co, Publishers— Literary work in 1901 . . .			66 14 7
		(£498 18 4)		54 7 6
				1375 6 8

On the right-hand side of the cash book, items of expenditure would occur, something like the following:—

Private and Domestic Accounts

1902.

Week ending 11th Jan.

			£ s. d.	£ s. d.
Jan. 6		Housekeeper, week ending 4th Jan.—		
2		Stores (Harrod's a/c)	10 9 3	
4		Laundry	3 7 6	
1		Food (butcher and baker)	12 3 7	
7		Wages	5 12 9	
27		Sundries	0 4 3	
			31 17 4	
		Butler, week ending 4th Jan —		
3		Smith & Co, wine & mineral waters	2 1 3 7	
6		Eaton, F., glass and china	0 17 9	
7		Wages of Footmen	5 12 6	
8		Extra Waiter	0 7 0	
13		Stamps and telegrams	1 9 7	
			9 10 5	
,, 7	20	L & N.W. Railway, season ticket, 4th instalment	4	
		Subscriptions—		
21		County Hospital	5	
21		Church Funds (lump sum for 1902)	6	
21		Town Fire Brigade (year 1901)	7	
,, 8	5	Gas Co., Quarterly a/c to 31st Dec. 1901	8	
		C H S.—Cash—		
27		Charity	1 0 0	
20		Travelling	2 0 0	
17		Petty expenses	2 0 0	
			5 0 0	
6		Wool & Co, a/c for blankets	9	
12		Jones, T. J., a/c for stationery	10 2 17 9	
12		,, „ printing	11 7 4 6	
			3 10 6	
16		T. F. L —Salary for quarter ended 31st Dec 1901		
		Petty Cash Book—		
20		Travelling	2 12 1	
13		Stamps and telegrams	10 7 4	
27		Sundries	0 14 1	
			13 13 6	
,, 9		Gardener, week ending 4th Jan —		
25		Wages	5 10 0	
24		Garden sundries	1 12 2	
24		J. Samuel, repairs to greenhouse	0 7 6	
			7 9 8	
,, 11		Coachman, month ending 4th Jan..		
9		Four weeks' forage	15 0 0	
10		Wages	9 0 0	
9		Sundries	2 7 0	
			26 7 0	
11		Timber, W. J., a/c for repairs (indoor)	13	
		Guest, Dr (dentist)—		
19		C H. S.	14 4 0 0	
19		F. A. S.	14 5 5 0	
			10 10 0	
22		Subscription to Club	15 9 5 0	
20		Phipps, a/c for extra carriages, etc	16 7 3 6	
			263 19 8	
		(£263 19 8)		

How to become a Private Secretary

It will be seen that by the above method the Cash Book is ruled off at the end of every week; but the totals are carried forward to the next week's account, so that at any period of the year the total income or the total expenditure up to date, or the available balance at the bank, may be seen almost at a glance. The actual amount of each week's income and of each week's expenditure may be shown within brackets at the foot of the ruled off pages, as above. It is best to begin a new page for each week.

The figures in the fourth column are the numbers given to received bills, acknowledgments of subscriptions, etc. Everything in the nature of a receipt should, of course, be preserved. The plan adopted in this case is to fold each receipt to a regular size, and docket it on the back with a consecutive number, as well as with the name of the payee and the amount. A corresponding number is placed in the fourth column of the Cash Book opposite the entry recording the payment. By this method a receipt can be quickly found in the numerically-arranged bundle. The numbers may either commence at No. 1 on the first of January in each year, or they may be allowed to follow on consecutively for several years.

The figures in the second column (immediately after the date) are references to the divisions or headings of a Summary Book which plays an important part in this method of keeping private and domestic accounts. It is a large post folio book, into which are abstracted all the items of expenditure that have been recorded in the Cash Book. It is ruled with fourteen sets of cash columns at each opening, to allow of thirteen weeks' entries and a quarterly total. On the left-hand side is a column of some 30 to 50 headings of the

Private and Domestic Accounts

expenditure, and a few blanks can be left at the bottom for any exceptional headings that may be found necessary from time to time. Here are some of the headings. It will be seen that the figures in the second column of the Cash Book correspond to the numbers which precede the headings here.

	1902	Week ending 11th Jan.	Week ending	Week ending	Total for Quarter.
		£ s. d.	£ s. d.	£ s. d.	£ s. d.
1	Housekeeping (food).	£ 12 3 7			
2	" (stores)	10 9 3			
3	Wine, beer, mineral waters . . .	1 3 7			
4	Laundry . . .	3 7 6			
5	Lighting (gas and oil)	10 14 4			
6	House replenishings	4 8 3			
7	Wages (indoor) . . .	11 5 3			
8	Extra help (waiters and charwomen)	0 7 0			
9	Stables . . .	17 7 0			
10	" (wages)	9 0 0			
11	House repairs . . .	6 4 2			
12	Stationery & printing	10 2 3			
13	Postage & telegrams.	11 16 11			
14	Insurance . . .				
15	Rates and taxes . . .				
16	Salaries . . .	50 0 0			
17	C H. S. . .	2 0 0			
18	F. A. S. . .				
19	Medical . . .	9 5 0			
20	Travelling . . .	17 0 7			
21	Subscriptions and do- nations . . .	57 7 0			
22	Club . . .	10 10 0			
23	Presents . . .				
24	Garden . . .	1 19 8			
25	" (wages) . . .	5 10 0			
26	Coal . . .				
27	Miscellaneous . . .	1 18 4			
28					
29					
30					
Totals . . .		263 19 8			
Ten more cash columns are added to provide for the thirteen weeks of the Quarter.					

Four folio pages having been allowed for the four quarters of the year, the fifth page, or "opening,"

How to become a Private Secretary

can be utilised for the quarterly and yearly totals, thus :

	1902.	First Quarter.	Second Quarter	Third Quarter	Fourth Quarter.	Total for Year.
1	Housekeeper (food)					
2	" (stores)					
3	Wine, beer, mineral waters . . .					
4	Laundry . . . etc, etc					
	Totals . . .					

It will be seen that any branch of expenditure can be compared week by week, quarter by quarter, and year by year; and that the same comparison can readily be made as regards the whole of the expenditure in any week, quarter, or year.

In cases where income and expenditure are comparatively small, a monthly (instead of a weekly) casting-up of the Cash Book may suffice, and, where this plan is adopted, the Summary Book can be made to show, at one opening, the twelve monthly calculations and the yearly totals.

The advantages of the method here set forth are (1) Simplicity,—only two books of a very simple kind being kept; (2) Clearness,—the financial position being easily ascertainable at any moment, and comparisons in any branch of expenditure being readily made.

PETTY CASH ACCOUNTS.

Heads of departments—gardener, coachman, butler, housekeeper—and all to whom is entrusted the making of small payments, should be held

Private and Domestic Accounts

responsible for keeping clear and accurate records of all disbursements. It will save the secretary trouble if he can arrange for all the Petty Cash Books to be alike in form. Those who keep them should be encouraged to present them properly balanced and summarised. A little instruction to this end will sometimes be necessary, but, once the system is understood, head servants and others are usually quite ready to do their part to make it effective. It is scarcely necessary to give here any of the various forms of a Petty Cash Book. If money is advanced in the first instance, the book will, of course, show the amount of the advance, all the separate items of expenditure day by day, a weekly or monthly summary, the total amount expended in the week or month, and the amount remaining in hand. The usual plan is to give to the keeper of the book a cheque for the sum expended, thus bringing the amount in hand up to the amount originally advanced. Sometimes, however, there is no advance, and the Petty Cash Book is simply a record of payments made—unless indeed (say, in the case of a gardener) some produce has been sold and there are receipts of cash to be shown. In any case the secretary's duty is to check the items in the book, enter the details of the summary in his own Cash Book, receive and number the vouchers, and draw a cheque for the amount required.

SUBSCRIPTION Book.

In cases where many institutions, societies, charities, etc., are subscribed to, a separate record of subscriptions and donations is very useful. It enables the secretary to make the periodical payments as they fall due without waiting for applications, and also affords him a handy book of reference in this

How to become a Private Secretary

department of expenditure. Perhaps the easiest method of keeping this record is to make the entries in an ordinary quarto book of about 120 pages ruled with faint lines, an index being cut at the beginning. If the body of the book is divided into twelve parts, four two-page "openings" are available for each month after allowing 24 pages for the index. In an outer column on the left-hand page are entered the names of the institutions, charities, etc., to which the subscriptions or donations are paid; and the remainder of the page (as well as the whole of the right-hand page) is ruled with cash columns. Two cash columns are required for each year, one for subscriptions, the other for donations. Here is a blank specimen, only a part of the right-hand page being shown:—

August

Societies, Institutions, etc.	1902		1903		1904	
	Subs.	Dons.	Subs.	Dons.	Subs.	Dons.

The subscriptions or donations paid or payable in

Private and Domestic Accounts

each month are thus separately recorded. The book is of course paged, and the index enables one to turn immediately to the page on which any subscription or donation is recorded. A book of the size indicated above, and ruled as suggested, will last for five years. If only two "openings" are allowed for a month, it will last double the time. The names of the societies will in either case have to be re-written at the end of five years.

ORDER FORMS AND ESTIMATES.

Some simple printed Order Form should be employed throughout the establishment. It is convenient to have a number (150 or 200) bound up in a book, each page being numbered consecutively, and perforated, so as to be easily torn out. Duplicates should be kept either by means of carbon copies or by entries on a counterfoil, and, when the order has been completed, a note should be made of the fact on the counterfoil or carbon copy.

The wisdom of obtaining estimates for any goods required which are of an exceptional kind, or for work to be done which involves the employment of outside labour, is too obvious to need more than bare mention.

MISCELLANEOUS WORK

IN the introductory chapter of this book the work of a private secretary was described as varied and interesting, and in the second and third chapters the qualifications enumerated were such as to suggest frequent excursions beyond the daily round of correspondence. This important branch of the work having now received attention, and something having also been said about the keeping of private accounts, we are free to take into consideration a few of the other items which contribute to the sum total of a secretary's work, give it the variety spoken of, and add to its general interest.

INTERVIEWS, DEPUTATIONS, ETC.

Much correspondence is sometimes saved, and the settlement of matters greatly facilitated, by personal interviews. For hints and suggestions as to the conduct of such verbal communications, I cannot do better than refer my readers to a book I have previously mentioned—the late Sir Courtenay Boyle's "Hints on the Conduct of Business." Some of the best chapters in the book are those on Interviews, Deputations, Councils, and Conferences. They naturally discuss such matters rather from the official standpoint, the author having been at one time Private Secretary to the Lord Lieutenant of

Miscellaneous Work

Ireland, and subsequently Permanent Secretary to the Board of Trade ; but it is worth while to read what so experienced and able an official has to say on topics of this kind ; for interviews arranged by individuals in their private capacity, although necessarily less formal in character, have much the same ends in view as those which take place in Government offices, viz., the discovery of a man's mind or the obtaining of information on a particular subject ; the easy and rapid advancement of business which is likely to make slow progress if conducted by correspondence ; and the removal of misunderstandings, objections, prejudices, etc., which letters have failed, or may fail, to stir. "An interview," says Sir Courtenay Boyle, "may show how to extract a tiny little bit of grit from the machine which, unsuspected and unremoved, might cause intolerable delay. It may show where a trifling and easy concession can end opposition, the real nature of which no amount of writing could ever detect."

A secretary's presence at interviews arranged by his chief is often necessary in order that a brief record of what has passed may be compiled, and agreed upon by both parties, before the interview ends. This is usually dictated to the secretary in the room, and read over by him from his short-hand notes, in order that any corrections may be made. If the matter under discussion is of great importance, the transcript of the record is afterwards submitted to the parties for signature, or is at least duplicated, so that each may have a copy.

A secretary is sometimes called upon to conduct interviews on behalf of his chief. Such important work can obviously be delegated only to a man who has proved himself to possess the requisite tact and judgment, and who thoroughly knows his chief's mind.

How to become a Private Secretary

But, if he is thus trusted, he will take the greatest care to preserve the same sort of record of what passes at the interview as that which would be dictated to him if his chief were conducting the interview and he himself were merely present as shorthand amanuensis.

Such a record is even more necessary when the chief receives a deputation: indeed, it may even be desirable for the secretary to take a full shorthand note of what is said, for the greater the number of persons received, the greater the possibilities of mistake or misrepresentation (probably quite unintentional) as to what has passed.

Members of Parliament and others who are actively interested in public affairs often find it helpful, when a particular course of action is contemplated, to obtain the views of men of knowledge and experience as to its wisdom, its chances of success, the sort of opposition it will probably encounter, and the like. This is sometimes done by means of a conference. For such a meeting the secretary may, under his chief's direction, have to draw up a memorandum of facts or heads of discussion, or a statement of the convener's attitude and proposals in regard to the matter submitted for consideration; and it is more than likely that he will also be required, if not to take a full shorthand note, at least to make a summary of the views expressed during the discussion. Sometimes the chairman of the conference will, before the members separate, sum up the results of the discussion, and have a shorthand note taken of his words, in order that all present may know what he believes to be the general view. This summary can afterwards be written out, and, if necessary, signed by the members of the conference.

Miscellaneous Work

REPORTS, SUMMARIES, ETC.

From the foregoing paragraphs it will be gathered that the secretary becomes at times a reporter of private meetings. The cases in which he will be asked to take a verbatim note will probably not be many. When they occur, the shorthand notes are taken perhaps as a safeguard in case subsequent reference is necessary, but more often for the purpose of compiling a condensed report. To a trained journalist such condensations are, of course, an everyday occurrence. He seldom takes more notes than he requires, and often writes out his condensed report during the progress of the discussion he is recording. But to the private secretary who is innocent of journalistic ways the task may not be quite so easy, and he will probably find it safer, although more laborious, to take a careful shorthand note and write his condensations afterwards. In any case he should spare no pains to make his report at once brief and comprehensive (the two things are not incompatible), clear, and accurate.

Akin to this kind of work is the task of summarising the contents of bulky blue-books, formal documents, bundles of correspondence, etc. The secretary may occasionally get a direction of this sort: "Take that bundle of correspondence, and let me know what it is all about," or "I should like to have the gist of the Report of that Commission: let me have a brief memorandum of the facts and conclusions." Such directions mean that the secretary must read every line of the letters or documents, subject the whole to a thorough "boiling down," and finally present clear and concise memoranda which will bear the test of comparison with the original documents, and from

How to become a Private Secretary

which nothing essential is omitted. This is rather laborious work to the tyro in such matters, but facility comes with practice, and the subjects dealt with are often of great interest.

PRINTED MATTER.

There are few secretaries who are not occasionally called upon to prepare matter for the printer, and some knowledge of the rules which are usually observed in the process is very advantageous. To know what one wants in the shape of a circular letter, a printed report, a pamphlet, or even a book: and to know how to tell the printer "in his own tongue" what the desideratum is: are two different kinds of knowledge. Many people who are ready enough with the pen are absolutely at a loss when directions have to be given for transferring MS. into print. Fortunately the printer is usually intelligent and suggestive, and perhaps in the end all goes well. But much of the additional expenditure of time and money caused by alterations in proofs might be saved if the initial instructions to the printer were clear, and to some extent technical. The secretary who has much to do with the printer will find it a good investment to spend sixpence or a shilling in one of the numerous little handbooks of information on the subject, and learn from its pages something about the sizes of type, the correction of proofs, the sizes and qualities of paper, etc. Nobody will appreciate the knowledge he thus gains more than the printer with whom he has to deal; indeed, some printers issue, for the benefit of their customers, booklets giving instructions in matters appertaining to general printing, and some of these are thoroughly useful little manuals.

Miscellaneous Work

THE LIBRARY.

From the subject of printing to the subject of books is an easy transition. Unrestricted access to a good library is very often one of the great privileges of a private secretary, and even if his many duties are too pressing to admit of his taking very full advantage of the privilege, he will contrive to "scrape acquaintance" with his chief's books somehow and sometimes. In the early days of my own secretariat I had one very excellent opportunity of this sort. As a kind of holiday task I undertook to insert in all my chief's books a new book-plate, which had just been designed and printed. By devoting a couple of hours of each day to the work, I could have finished it in a week or ten days; but as I had three or four weeks in front of me there was no need to hurry, and from the outset I dipped freely into the books as they passed through my hands. But by degrees, and almost inevitably, the dipping process took precedence of the pasting process, and the allotted time of every day became all too short for inserting even a dozen book-plates! Finally I had to bring my browsing to an abrupt termination, and devote nearly the whole of two days to get my task finished in time.

I am afraid that the moral of this confession is that a secretary who is a lover of books must not trust himself *too* often in his chief's library. At any rate, after so serious a warning (!) he will be on his guard when he undertakes to catalogue the books therein. It will be a perilous occupation! The following brief description of a good method of arranging books and preparing a catalogue is given in redemption of a promise made in a previous chapter.

The books, we will suppose, are grouped on the

How to become a Private Secretary

shelves primarily according to their subject-matter, with a secondary classification (where possible) dependent upon authorship. Thus we have different sets of shelves for biography, history, theology, fiction, poetry, etc., and in each set the works of the same author are brought together. For instance, on the shelves devoted to fiction we have a Jane Austen group, a Dickens group, a Meredith group, etc. ; while in poetry we classify Wordsworth, Tennyson, Browning, etc. Each block of shelves has a number, and each shelf in the block is identified by a letter, the top shelf being "a," the second "b," and so on down to the bottom. If, for example, biography is Block 1, and the "Life of Lord Lawrence" is on the second shelf from the top, that book would be entered in the catalogue as "1.b." And, in order that it might be known to which shelf the book belonged, the reference "1.b." would be written in pencil at the top left-hand corner of the blank page facing the title-page. All the books are thus marked, the object of writing in pencil being that the mark may be easily rubbed out and another mark substituted if the book should be removed to another shelf.

So much for the shelves and the books. Two registers are necessary, ruled with faint lines and with a margin on the left-hand side of each page. In one register are arranged alphabetically the titles of the books, the authors' names being inserted subordinately ; in the other the authors' names appear alphabetically, taking precedence of the titles. In each case the shelves are clearly indicated by means of the numbers and letters, and both registers are divided alphabetically by an ordinary letter-index cut on the edges. There is thus a double reference to every book in the library. If (to take the book just mentioned) we wished to find the "Life of Lord Lawrence," by Mr R. Bosworth Smith, we should find

Miscellaneous Work

it indexed in the Register of Titles, as "i.b.—Lawrence (Lord), Life, by R. Bosworth Smith, 2 vols., 1883," and in the Register of Authors, as "i.b.—Smith, R. Bosworth, Life of Lord Lawrence, 2 vols., 1883;" with a cross reference "Bosworth Smith (see Smith)."

PAMPHLETS, NEWSPAPER CUTTINGS, ETC.

Men who are known to take an interest in public affairs are generally the recipients of quantities of pamphlets on all sorts of subjects. Every post brings them. Some of them are rubbish, and go at once into the waste-paper basket; others, while not of great importance, are worth at least cursory reading. But there are a few of permanent value, and it is worth while to send these to the bookbinder from time to time. They need careful binding, owing to their varying size, and there should be some attempt at classification. If the volumes are half bound in vellum, and a list of the contents of each written on the back, there will be no difficulty in finding quickly any particular pamphlet required.

The ordinary indexed newspaper-cuttings book is a most useful receptacle for all oddments of printed matter which it is desired to keep, and the secretary may find it advisable, if his chief makes many public utterances, to secure the newspaper notices of these through one of the press-cutting agencies, and thus have them preserved for future reference. When a book is full, a label should be affixed to the outside, showing the period over which its contents extend. In these books, too, may be inserted specimens of circular letters, invitation cards, etc., which are sent out from time to time.

How to become a Private Secretary

THE SOCIAL SIDE.

Secretarial work in a private house is necessarily to some extent in touch with the social life of the family, and in this respect presents a marked and not unpleasant contrast to secretarial work carried on in an office. There may be, for example, such gatherings as garden parties and drawing-room meetings to arrange for, and while these sometimes involve a considerable amount of clerical labour in the issuing of invitations, they yet form agreeable interludes in the daily programme. Then, too, the young secretary may, as time passes, be allowed to participate freely in the more general amenities of the house. This is by no means a certainty. much depends on circumstances, and more on the secretary himself: but, should the opportunity be given, he will be a wise man if he always keeps in front of him the *raison d'être* of his position, and puts everything of a social kind in a subordinate place.

MECHANICAL APPLIANCES.

IT is, perhaps, rather a loose application of words to describe as "labour-saving" the many mechanical appliances which are now universally employed wherever there is clerical work to be done. Like many other inventions in the past, these products of the latter part of the nineteenth century have substituted one form of labour for another, and, by achieving the same result in quicker time and with greater facility, have added immensely to the output. Generally speaking, the working hours of an individual have not been lessened: he simply does more in a given time. Nor has the number of secretaries and clerks decreased: on the contrary, the introduction of machinery into offices has stimulated enterprise, and the number of office workers is larger than ever. The typewriter alone is responsible for a large accession to their ranks, and also for the accomplishment of an enormous amount of work which was never attempted with the pen. And so with all the various copying and duplicating machines: they may occasionally rob the printer of a job, but the work done by their aid is more frequently work that would never be done at all if it could be undertaken only in the printing office. In one respect, however, there is real "saving" of labour: it lies in the relief secured, by means of these mechanical appliances, from the severe physical strain of many hours of continuous pen-writing.

The modern private secretary is generally as glad

How to become a Private Secretary

to avail himself of this relief as are those who work in commercial and other offices, and I would strongly counsel all who look forward to secretarial employment to obtain a practical knowledge of at least one machine of each class.

THE TYPEWRITER.

In view of such typewriter manuals as have been previously referred to,¹ and of the now almost universal knowledge of the powers of the typewriter, it would be quite superfluous to give in this book any details as to its mechanism or capabilities. I have already urged that its aid is as advantageous in secretarial work as it is in other clerical occupations, and I would only here add, for the benefit of the secretarial aspirant (1) that he will be wise, when setting about the learning of the art of typewriting, or when buying a machine, to select one of the "best makes,"—say, a "Bar-Lock," a "Remington," a "Smith-Premier," or a "Yost"—the extra cost, as compared with that of cheap machines, being really a good investment of money; (2) that it is well worth while to take pains to turn out really first-class work, and, as means to that end, to learn all that it is possible to learn about the machine chosen, to keep it thoroughly clean and in good order, and to practise assiduously.

THE PHONOGRAPH.

This is another of the remarkable inventions given to us by our American cousins, and during the last few years it has found favour with some people as a dictating medium. If you call at the offices of the Edison-Bell Phonograph Corporation in Charing Cross

¹ See page 22.

Mechanical Appliances

Road, London, you will find one of the courteous members of the staff quite ready to demonstrate the powers of the machine. You hear him dictate a letter to it through a tube, just as he would speak into a telephone, but his words, instead of being conveyed along a wire, are recorded on a wax cylinder revolved by an electric battery. When he has finished dictating he merely makes a slight change in the mechanism, and the process is reversed: you hear the letter reproduced by the machine with remarkable clearness. This is fascinating, and, if you are a shorthand writer, you are greatly impressed—perhaps somewhat disturbed—by his assurance that the phonograph will ere long practically supersede the stenographer. Many heads of offices and others, he tells you, are already conducting their correspondence by means of this machine. They dictate their letters to the phonograph, and the phonograph reproduces them for the typist. The dictation may be as rapid as desired; the record must be accurate, for the phonograph cannot make a mistake; the reproduction is in the same tone of voice, and may be repeated over and over again. You carry away from the office a prospectus, in which you are reminded that “the phonograph is available at any time of the day or night, does not go out to lunch, never wants a holiday, and is, in fact, a mechanical amanuensis.” In short, you gather from all you have seen, heard, and read about the machine, that the shorthand writer as such is no longer the indispensable person he imagines himself to be, and that the phonograph places him quite in the background, if it does not dispense with his services altogether.

But, on reflection, you begin to see that the phonograph has its drawbacks, and that, after all, the shorthand writer is not in so sad a plight as you had been led to imagine. It occurs to you that

How to become a Private Secretary

the machine would unerringly record, not only the *ipsissima verba* of what one wished to say, but every slip of the tongue, every word used in correcting such slips, every expression of hesitation, every cough, and every other involuntary sound uttered at the mouth of the receiving tube; and, knowing something of the inability of most men to dictate letters, etc., without slips, alterations, and the like, you begin to find amusement in the thought of the phonograph reproducing a letter somewhat after this fashion:—

To John Johnson, Esq.

Dear Sir,—In reply to your—No, that's rather too formal. I thank you for your letter of yesterday's date. You are mistaken—There are some errors—Don't put that. The statements you make are not quite in accordance with the facts, and—but I will not—but I need not—but no good purpose would be served by my detailing—by my going into further detail. May I again—Let me again explain to you my own position in this—er—complicated and—er—difficult—in relation to what I may fairly call—No, cross out that sentence; this is better. I do not think you can be aware of the position which I have always taken in these—during the progress of these negotiations I have consistently endeavoured—It has been my constant endeavour to bring all the responsible parties into—to make the individuals concerned feel their responsibility—feel the full weight of their responsibility for carrying the scheme to a successful issue. I cannot help—You will, I am sure, agree—admit—realize, on reflection, how impossible it is for me to do more than—to go further in the matter unless I have some—unless the promoters themselves will assure me—will give me some guarantee that they are really in earnest. Until they—I await their further—At present I have no such guarantee.

Yours truly,

You concoct this letter for your own amusement, but you well know that many shorthand writers have, every day of their lives, to receive dictation almost, if not quite, as halting as this, and that not one man

Mechanical Appliances

in a hundred can dictate important letters without considerable alteration of words and sentences in the process. The shorthand writer, you know by experience, can easily effect the alterations in his notes during the progress of the dictation; but you wonder what the typist would do with a phonograph record even half as bad as the one you have imagined. On further reflection you come to the conclusion that the phonograph may probably answer very well in particular cases, where the matter dictated to it is absolutely "straightforward," but that it is too severely mechanical to be generally serviceable under normal conditions. And I think you are right. If all dictating could be done without hesitation, variation, or alteration, there would be a larger demand for the phonograph than there is to-day, although there would be still some minor difficulties to be surmounted before its use would become general—e.g. the comparatively small amount of matter which a single cylinder will hold; the present necessity for reproducing the dictated matter at a speed to suit the "pitch" of the record rather than the powers of the typist; and so on. It is always possible that these smaller difficulties may be overcome, but it seems extremely doubtful whether any considerable number of men, who are in the habit of doing their correspondence by dictation, will ever be persuaded to give up the freedom of utterance which they indulge in when dictating to a shorthand writer, and submit to be hampered by the fearful and wonderful exactness of phonograph "records."

I have referred at some length to this machine because, while cordially recognising its usefulness for certain kinds of work, I feel it is worth while, in view of what is sometimes claimed for it, to point out its limitations, and to urge would-be private secretaries not to neglect to become proficient in shorthand, on

How to become a Private Secretary

the assumption that any chief under whom they may ultimately seek to serve will be certain to do all his dictating to a phonograph. The probabilities are the other way. He may use the machine for some purposes, but when it comes to correspondence and important matters requiring thought, he will most likely prefer to have at his side a shorthand secretary who can give him that intelligent co-operation which the machine cannot give, and who can work anywhere and everywhere—in a train, for instance—and under conditions impossible for the machine.

COPYING AND DUPLICATING APPARATUS.

It is unnecessary to describe here in detail the various processes by which copies of original letters and documents, whether written by the pen or by the typewriter, may be made. These processes are fully described in various manuals dealing with office work. All that is necessary is to briefly indicate the appliances which are found to be useful in the particular work under consideration.

A copying-press for taking one or two copies of pen-written letters should find a place in the secretary's room. The screw-press is familiar to everybody, but the lever-press is perhaps not so commonly known. I have myself used for some ten years one of the latter type (a press known by the name of "Racine," and supplied by Mr J. L. Young, of 67 Fore Street, London, E.C.), and have found it answer admirably. The copying may be done by it equally well, either in a copying-book or on loose sheets, the pressure being adjusted by a screw-wheel and applied by a lever pulled down to a horizontal position.

Copying on a more extensive scale—now generally distinguished from the work of the copying-press by

Mechanical Appliances

the term "duplicating"—is sure to be necessary at times, and the secretary may be called upon to use either an apparatus of the gelatine class or one of the stencil type. He should therefore be familiar with both processes. Of the former kind (the gelatine or composition class) the best which has come under my notice is the "Simplex Hektograph" (Copying Apparatus Company, 123 Cannon Street, London, E.C.). It has two advantages which are not generally met with in other apparatus of the kind, namely, that the writing is reproduced in *black* ink, instead of in the more common violet colour, and that no washing of the composition is necessary. I have used this machine with the best results; but, of course, as in all gelatine copying processes, the number of copies is limited to fifty or sixty.

If a larger number of copies is required, one of the stencil processes must be adopted. There are now several which may be classed as first-rate. Of these, perhaps the best known is Edison's "Mimeograph" (Messrs Martyn & Co., 63 Leadenhall Street, E.C.). It is excellent for duplicating either autograph or type-written originals. I have used it for many years, and produced thoroughly satisfactory copies. Recently the best work has been made more easy of execution by the introduction into the machine of a fixed cloth diaphragm, through which the ink passes before coming into contact with the stencil placed underneath. By means of this improvement several of the little difficulties which have hitherto had to be guarded against in working with stencil machines have been entirely overcome.

Some of the makers of the stencil apparatus have lately introduced rotary machines for rapid work. I doubt whether the *best* results are produced by these machines, but there can be no question about their doing work of quite an average kind at an astonishing speed.

NOTABLE MEN AT WORK WITH THEIR SECRETARIES.

THIS final chapter consists of a few slight sketches of eminent men of the nineteenth century at work with their secretaries, the description in each case being mainly in the words of the secretary himself. One special characteristic of much of the secretarial work of to-day—viz., the taking of shorthand notes of dictated letters, etc.—is not, it will be observed, apparent in these instances. The time of the shorthand secretary had not fully come, and although possibly some of the writers here quoted may have been acquainted with some system of shorthand, there is no evidence to show that, if so, they made any practical use of it. The general conditions, however, under which these men worked, ten, twenty, or fifty years ago, are not otherwise very dissimilar from the present conditions of such work ; and I venture to think that my readers, even if they dare not themselves hope to obtain secretaryships under quite such exalted chiefs, will find the following biographical details full of interest. References to the books from which they are extracted (by kind permission of the authors and publishers) are given, in case it is desired to read more of the lives of the notable men whose working habits are here described.

Notable Men at Work

A GREAT VICEROY.

In Mr Bosworth Smith's deeply interesting biography of Lord Lawrence, personal reminiscences of the eminent Indian official are given by his private secretaries. As Chief Commissioner of the Punjab (1853-59, a period including the Indian Mutiny), Sir John Lawrence, as he then was, rendered incalculable service to the Empire at a most critical juncture; and he was greatly aided in his work by his secretary, Richard (afterwards Sir Richard) Temple, who joined him in 1854. This is Temple's description of his reception by his chief:

"John Lawrence was very ill with headache, lying down in a dark room and much depressed. Hearing me enter an outer room, he called out abruptly, 'So glad you are come; just look at those letters,' and said no more. In the afternoon he was better, and able to leave his room. 'Very glad,' he said, 'to have got you in your proper place at last. I am glad of your opinion, and of course very glad of your pen; but, remember, it will be *my* policy and *my* views; not yours. Your day may come; it is mine now. Every dog may have its day!' He seemed to be unapproachably beyond me then, and so still he does; but in one sense his words came true, for I have filled offices similar to his since."¹

Edward Paske, who was acting private secretary to Sir John for a few months just after the fall of Delhi, says that his chief was a very rapid and, at the same time, a very thorough worker in dealing with the enormous quantities of important despatches, reports, etc., which reached him daily.

¹ "Life of Lord Lawrence," by R. Bosworth Smith (Smith, Eldei & Co., 1883), vol. 1. p. 439.

How to become a Private Secretary

“He was remarkably swift in sifting and putting aside all extraneous matter from any case before him, readily seizing the main point or question at issue, and on this his opinion was always clear, well grounded, and decided. Except under very special circumstances, or when papers were marked ‘Urgent,’ he would never depart from the routine of taking up all work in the order in which it came to him from the secretariat. If, on opening an office-box, a tempting political paper appeared under a dry Public Works estimate, it was not looked at until the uppermost pile had been disposed of.”¹

In the early days of his subsequent Viceroyalty we are told that—

“His (Lawrence’s) work was done, as in the old Punjab days, in the loosest of loose dresses, his coat and waistcoat and collar thrown off, his shirt sleeves tucked up, his slippers on his feet. On one occasion, soon after his arrival, though he was in other respects duly attired, he omitted, in a moment of over-work or over-worry, to change his slippers before receiving a deputation of Calcutta dignitaries. It was an omission which might even have pleased those who had eyes to see, through his neglect, the true character of the man. But there were some who never forgot or forgave it. When he heard that he had given offence, he turned in astonishment to his private secretary, and said, with a simplicity which, if it ever reached the ears of the deputation, might well have disarmed any lingering resentment on their part, ‘Why, Hathaway, they were quite new and good slippers.’

“It must be remembered (says Dr Hathaway) that owing to the two months’ interregnum which had occurred the arrears of work had accumulated greatly. The red leather despatch-boxes brought, at all hours of the day, from the civil, military, financial, and other

¹ “Life of Lord Lawrence,” by Bosworth Smith, vol. ii. p. 241.

Notable Men at Work

Departments, used sometimes to be piled up one on the top of the other to the height of several feet from the floor. But the whole were cleared before midnight, and the work was done *thoroughly*. No one who saw Sir John Lawrence labouring through a mass of papers on tenant-right in Oude, or examining the plans for barracks submitted by the Public Works Department, or the dry and depressing statistics tabulated by the Sanitary Commission, would wonder at his writing in his shirt sleeves, or have a right to feel indignant that when called away to receive a Municipal Deputation he should forget to exchange his slippers for his boots, or to remove every mark of ink from his fingers.”¹

A GREAT ARCHBISHOP.

The reminiscences of Archbishop Tait’s chaplain-secretary and biographer have been referred to in a previous chapter as illustrating the use which some public men make of their secretaries as critics. There is so much more of vivid word-painting in this representation of the Archbishop during the years 1877-82, that I venture to reproduce the following bits of the picture.²

“ As years advanced he grew less and less inclined either to read letters himself or to write the answers. With a few necessary exceptions every letter was read to him, every answer dictated, partly because of an increasing weakness or stiffness in his fingers, partly because of the better opportunities which dictation gave for a running criticism upon his words, partly because he could work best when walking about the room or garden. He was always in the open air

¹ “Life of Lord Lawrence,” by Bosworth Smith, vol. ii. pp. 408-9.

² “Life of Archbishop Tait,” by R. T. Davidson and W. Benham (Macmillan), 1891, vol. ii. pp. 551-597.

How to become a Private Secretary

when possible, and many of the most important and careful letters I can remember had to be scribbled as best they might while we paced up and down the gravel walks at Lambeth or the little footpath along the Broadstairs cliffs. His scribe used to be reduced to sore straits on a windy day, and we came to the last straw when he insisted on my revising and annotating a series of Visitation statistics upon sheets of flimsy foolscap while riding with him on horseback along the Thames Embankment. After the sorrows of 1878, when he became almost suddenly an old man, he took to dictating to me the letters of supreme importance only, and contented himself with briefest directions for the rest. But no letter, unless purely formal, was allowed to leave the house till he had seen or rather heard it. The 'sacred principle of delegation,' as he called it, became with him a fine art, and he applied it with a success to which I have known no parallel; rarely writing a letter himself, and yet retaining even in small matters a control and recollection which frequently surprised us all. He insisted, even when letter-baskets were heaviest, on our going right ahead through each day's work, taking big and little things just as they came. 'Never disturb the providential strata: take them as they lie: we shall come to the big things in their proper turn.' On days of special pressure one had to circumvent this often unworkable rule by a little management beforehand: but he always professed to disapprove. 'Now, then, you've been tampering with the strata again. Why don't you stick to the rule?' I have always wished that I could have known him in his younger and more active days. And yet I believe the last decade of his life was in some respects the best. His remarkable power of work was shown, not in the number of his daily working hours, but in the multitude of things he compassed in a morning or

Notable Men at Work

an afternoon, and the use he made of every moment in the carriage or elsewhere. He had never at any period of his life attempted to rival the ubiquity or versatility of Bishop Wilberforce, but he shared with him the power of passing, without fussiness or strain, from one engagement to another, and of utilising for the dictation of important letters even the smallest interstices of time. No picture of him would be complete which did not mark this absence of fussiness as one of his peculiar characteristics. It was the rarest possible thing to see him in a hurry about anything. Addington is four miles from the railway station. He always used to dictate letters on the way, and would irritate his good old coachman beyond endurance, when every effort had been expended to catch a train, by calmly sitting still in the carriage to complete a paragraph when the bell had rung and the train was on the very point of starting. Looking back upon the daily correspondence of those busy years, the characteristics which stand out most vividly in my recollection are, I think, three. First, his invariable anxiety to regard the matter rather than the manner of every letter he received. 'Angry? of course he is. Never mind that. What is it he asks me to do?' The letter might be prosy and long-winded, or curt even to rudeness. It might be overflowing with personal grievances, or sternly reticent and reserved. It was all the same. 'What is the point? What do you gather are the facts?' If the story was a long one, especially in Colonial matters, where our geography or history were at fault, he would make us write out for him in black and white a brief cold statement of the unvarnished facts; and then, if necessary, he would go into the whole matter with that strange penetration which seemed to carry him straight to the point of a controversy, whether in great things or small. I have never known

How to become a Private Secretary

any one else who could, with the same quick clearness, disentangle the threads of an intricate correspondence on some entirely novel subject. He would always dictate an answer or decision the moment he had listened to the letters, and would then leave it if necessary to 'simmer' for a day, and to be criticised from end to end before it was sent off, and generally, if the matter was a complicated one, he would at the last moment, before signing the letter, re-state the case aloud in a few clear sentences as he walked about the room. 'The man asks me to do so-and-so. I have answered that I won't, and for two reasons: First, that it isn't my business; and, secondly, that I think he is in the wrong. Will that do?' Of course there may be nothing peculiar or original in this way of doing business, but it became so regular a habit with him, that I have thought it worth recording.

"Next, I remember his constant anxiety that no letter should seem harsh or unkind. It used to be a joke among his secretaries that when he had written some severe or stern reply to a controversialist or complainant, he would always say to us, 'See if it is quite kind.' But it was perfectly genuine, and again and again he has kept an official letter or memorandum back until the following day, saying, 'Let us see to-morrow morning whether it looks unkind.' Or again—a very frequent order—'Tell him he's a consummate ass, but do it very kindly.'

"The third characteristic which comes back to me in recalling the correspondence of those years, is the unfailing humour with which he lightened the drudgery of every day. No amount of prosiness on the one hand or of petty ill-temper and spitefulness upon the other, could usually avail to spoil his quiet good humour or provoke him into irritable replies. The strain of momentous work, and the

Notable Men at Work

tension of difficult situations, may oftentimes be lightened and relaxed by one who has a keen, and withal a good-natured eye for the humorous side of even the gravest facts of life. It is perhaps a rare quality in ecclesiastics, and in most men it is not without its peril. In the Archbishop it was accompanied by an earnestness so intense and a sympathy so tender, that I do not believe he ever, in this particular way, gave a moment's pain to any one."

A GREAT SCIENTIST.

Charles Darwin (born 1809, died 1882) had for his secretary, during the last eight years of his life, his son, Francis Darwin, who afterwards published, in three volumes of absorbing interest, his father's letters, and a considerable amount of biographical and autobiographical matter.¹ It should be remembered that Darwin was for many years an invalid, and could rarely work two hours at a time. The son's reminiscences of his father's every-day life are given on pages 108-160 of the first volume. From these I make the following extracts.—

"After breakfasting alone about 7.45 he went to work at once, considering the $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours between 8 and 9.30 one of his best working times. At 9.30 he came into the drawing-room for his letters—rejoicing if the post was a light one, and being sometimes much worried if it was not. He would then hear any family letters read aloud as he lay on the sofa. The reading aloud, which also included part of a novel, lasted till about half-past 10, when he went back to work till 12, or a quarter past. By this time he considered his day's work over, and would often say, in a satisfied voice, 'I've done a good day's work.' He then went

¹ "Life and Letters of Charles Darwin." (Murray.) 1887.

How to become a Private Secretary

out of doors whether it was wet or fine. . . . After his lunch he read the newspaper, lying on the sofa in the drawing-room. . . . After he had read his paper came his time for writing letters. These, as well as the MS. of his books, were written by him as he sat in a huge horsehair chair by the fire, his paper supported by a board resting on the arms of the chair. When he had many or long letters to write, he would dictate them from a rough copy ; these rough copies were written on the backs of manuscripts or of proof-sheets, and were almost illegible, sometimes even to himself. He made a rule of keeping *all* letters that he received ; this was a habit which he learnt from his father, and which he said had been of great use to him.

"He received many letters from foolish, unscrupulous people, and all of these received replies. He used to say that if he did not answer them, he had it on his conscience afterwards, and no doubt it was in a great measure the courtesy with which he answered every one which produced the universal and widespread sense of his kindness of nature which was so evident on his death.

"He was considerate to his correspondents in other and lesser things : for instance, when dictating a letter to a foreigner, he hardly ever failed to say to me, 'You'd better try and write well, as it's to a foreigner.' His letters were generally written on the assumption that they would be carelessly read ; thus, when he was dictating, he was careful to tell me to make an important clause begin with an obvious paragraph 'to catch his eye,' as he often said. How much he thought of the trouble he gave others by asking questions, will be well enough shown by his letters. It is difficult to say anything about the general tone of his letters. they will speak for themselves. The unvarying courtesy of them is very striking. . . . He had a printed form to be used in replying to trouble-

Notable Men at Work

some correspondents, but he hardly ever used it; I suppose he never found an occasion that seemed exactly suitable. . . . In money and business matters he was remarkably careful and exact. He kept accounts with great care, classifying them, and balancing at the end of the year like a merchant.

"I must say something of his manner of working: one characteristic of it was his respect for time; he never forgot how precious it was. This was shown, for instance, in the way in which he tried to curtail his holidays; also, and more clearly, with respect to shorter periods. He would often say that saving the minutes was the way to get work done; he showed this love of saving the minutes in the difference he felt between a quarter of an hour and ten minutes' work; he never wasted a few spare minutes from thinking it was not worth while to set to work. I was often struck by his way of working up to the very limit of his strength, so that he suddenly stopped in dictating, with the words, 'I believe I mustn't do any more.' . . . It was only within the last few years that he adopted a plan of writing, which he was convinced suited him best, and which is described in the 'Recollections,' namely, writing a rough copy straight off without the slightest attention to style." [An account is then given of the careful correction and revision, first of the MS. and afterwards of the printer's proofs.]

"The correction of slips consisted, in fact, of two processes, for the corrections were first written in pencil, and then reconsidered and written in ink. . . . On the whole, I think the pains which my father took over the literary part of the work was very remarkable. He often laughed or grumbled at himself for the difficulty which he found in writing English, saying, for instance, that if a bad arrangement of a sentence was possible, he should be sure to adopt it. . . . When

How to become a Private Secretary

a sentence got hopelessly involved, he would ask himself, 'Now what *do* you want to say?' and his answer, written down, would often disentangle the confusion."

A GREAT PREACHER.

In the year 1900 the autobiography of Charles Haddon Spurgeon was given to the world by Mrs Spurgeon and the Rev. J. W. Harrald (who was for fourteen years his private secretary).¹ In the fourth volume, chapters 88 and 89 describe "A Typical Week's Work," and an illustration is given, on page 77, of "Mr Spurgeon and his Private Secretary in the Study at Westwood." Mr Spurgeon is seated at one end of a long table piled high with books and papers, and is revising the transcript of the shorthand writer's notes of one of that remarkable series of sermons preached at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, and published week by week for many years. Mr Harrald is at the side of the table, busily opening the morning's letters, and arranging those that require immediate answers.

"If there were any that he knew would be specially cheering, they were always placed where they would at once catch the eye of 'the dear Governor.' . . . Sometimes there were anonymous letters, complaining, abusive, and even blasphemous, and it was with peculiar satisfaction that they were prevented from ever wounding the beloved servant of the Lord, for whom they were intended by those who wrote them. The Pastor occasionally dictated replies to a few of the letters before continuing his sermon-revising; but more often, with his own hand, he wrote the answers in full, for he never spared himself if he could give

¹ "C. H. Spurgeon's Autobiography, by his Wife and his Private Secretary." Four vols. (Passmore & Alabaster.) 1900.

Notable Men at Work

greater pleasure to others. . . . He found it necessary to have a considerable variety of lithographed letters prepared ready to send to applicants for admission to the College and Orphanage, or to persons seeking situations, asking him to read manuscripts, or to write prefaces for new books, or to do any of the thousand and one things by which so many people sought to steal away his precious moments, and, at the same time, to augment the revenue of the Post-Office. It was usually far into the afternoon before the last folio of the sermon was reached and the messenger was able to start with it to the printing office. Then there were more letters to be answered, magazine proofs to be read, or other literary work to be advanced to the next stage; and it was with the utmost difficulty that even a few minutes could be secured for a quiet walk in the lovely garden that all day long seemed to be inviting the ceaseless worker to come and admire its many charms. . . .

“Mr Spurgeon’s position naturally brought him into correspondence with vast numbers of people all over the world; and he willingly wrote those thousands of letters which are now of almost priceless value to their possessors. Yet he often felt that he could have employed his time to far better purpose. Again and again he sorrowfully said, ‘I am only a poor clerk, driving the pen hour after hour; here is another whole morning gone, and nothing done but letters, letters, letters!’ When reminded of the joy and comfort he was ministering to so many troubled hearts by that very drudgery, he agreed that it was work for the Lord as truly as the preaching in which he so much more delighted.

“Saturday morning was the time for the Pastor and his private secretary to clear off, as far as possible, any arrears of work that had been accumulating during the week. The huge pile of letters was again

How to become a Private Secretary

attacked ; various financial matters were settled. . . . The secretary also then reported the result of interviews with students and various officials and workers in connection with the different institutions, and received instructions as to the replies to be given to their requests, or with regard to various matters tending to the general efficiency of the whole work. It was usual often on that morning for the President to see some of the applicants for admission to the College, or to examine the papers of others, and to dictate the letters conveying his decision, or making further inquiries, if there was a doubt either with regard to acceptance or rejection. . . . Then there were magazine articles to be written or revised, almanacks to be prepared, books to be read and reviewed, . . . and by the time the gong sounded for dinner, the Pastor was often heard to say, 'Well, we have got through a good morning's work, even if there is not much to show for it.'"

A GREAT PRIME MINISTER.

These sketches may fittingly be concluded with a private secretary's record of the late Mr Gladstone's habits and methods of work. The biography of the great statesman, which is being written by Mr John Morley, will probably tell us much on these subjects that has never yet been made public ; but, meanwhile, we have in Sir Edward Hamilton's monograph¹ (from which a brief extract was given in the second chapter of this manual) some very instructive details. The writer speaks as "one who was privileged to know Mr Gladstone for nearly forty years, and still

¹ "Mr Gladstone—a Monograph," by Sir Edward W. Hamilton, K.C.B. (John Murray.) 1898.

Notable Men at Work

more privileged to be brought in the closest contact with him for a considerable time." After commenting upon Mr Gladstone's unceasing industry, punctuality, and orderliness, Sir Edward Hamilton says:

"A still greater assistance to him was his capacity for using other men's brains, and for reducing to a minimum his own manual labour—in a word, the power which he had trained himself to acquire of 'devolving' work on others. . . . By lengthened experience he had reduced devolution to a highly perfected system. Between himself and his principal private secretaries there were no secrets. It was, he held, essential that they should see everything and know everything; otherwise their usefulness might be materially impaired. Accordingly, in the absence of specific directions to the contrary, they were at liberty to open all his letters, no heed being taken of pleas for privacy, however emphatic they might be; unless, indeed, resort had been had to two envelopes." (Particulars are then given as to how Mr Gladstone liked his letters folded, docketed, and prepared for him to deal with.) "When his correspondence reached him in this advanced condition, he proceeded to dispose of each letter in one of three ways, in the choice of which he was mainly influenced by the importance of the writer and of the subject matter. Either he would write the answer himself; or, after settling the gist of the reply, he would himself prefix the address and affix his signature, writing (as he called it) 'the head and the tail'; or he would leave the correspondent to be answered by the private secretary. Every letter which he wrote with his own hand, except on really trivial matters, had to be copied. . . . It was left to the private secretary to keep and to arrange the letters when answered and all papers when dealt with, except some chosen few which Mr Gladstone had

How to become a Private Secretary

some reason or other for having in his own custody; and the indication for such separate treatment was that he re-folded them himself more narrowly.

"It was only his important correspondence of which he disposed regularly day by day. With the rest of it, which was unceremoniously labelled 'rubbish,' he dealt once a week after it had been carefully sorted and classified; and by this means he secured a cursory survey of the whole of his correspondence at an extraordinarily small expenditure of labour and time. . . . The clearly defined system of devolution was more important and necessary to Mr Gladstone than to most modern statesmen, for he would never take advantage of the facilities of shorthand; and consequently all other 'short cuts' had in his case to be turned to the fullest account in order to economise time, which he had such a horror of wasting."

NOTE 18662

THE matter of this little Manual was originally published as a series of articles in the *Phonetic Journal*, and the writer desires to express his thanks to the proprietors (Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons) for the initial opportunity thus given to him to set forth his conception of the qualifications and work of a Private Secretary. His thanks are also due to the several authors and publishers who have kindly permitted him to quote from the works referred to in the last chapter.

